NOVEMBER 2017 VOLUME 27 ISSUE 11

BFI

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

# Sight&Sound

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## BACK TO THE FUTURE: DENIS VILLENEUVE ON

# BLADE RUNNER 2049

PLUS

● 'MINDHUNTER': DAVID FINCHER INTERVIEW ● ARMANDO IANNUCCI ON 'THE DEATH OF STALIN'
● 'CALL ME BY YOUR NAME' ● FEMALE STARS OF JAPANESE CINEMA ● PAKULA'S PARANOIA TRILOGY

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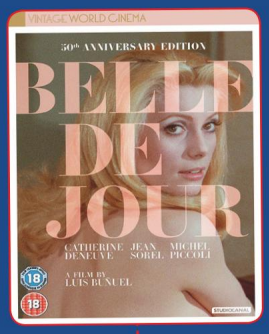
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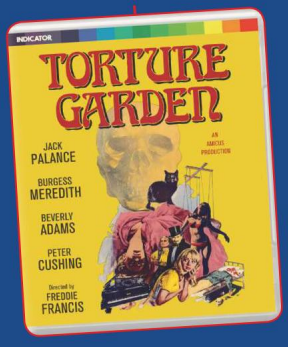


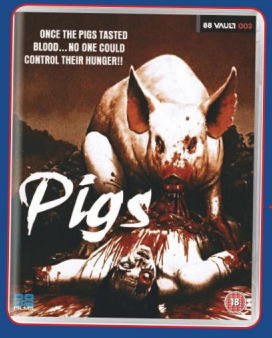


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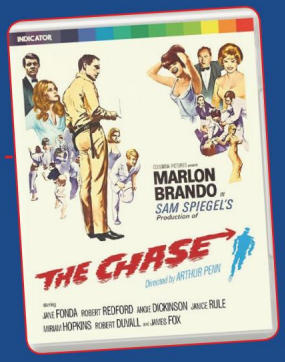


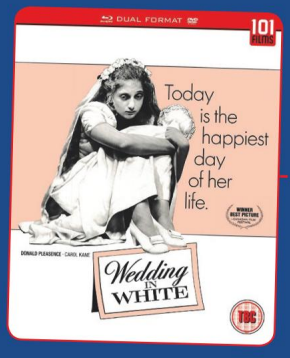


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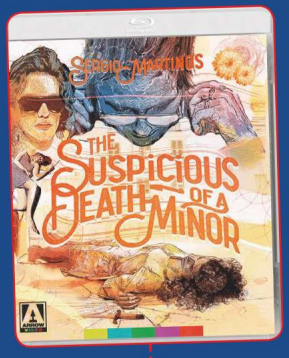


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blu-ray
out now

the house on sorority row
blu-ray
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COVER

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BFI Film Forever

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# new films

FOPP

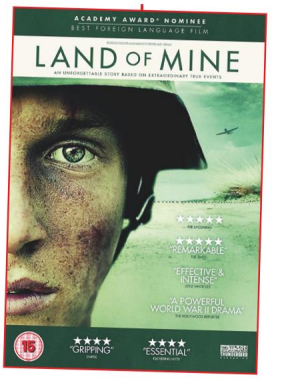
**film of the month**

**a man called ove**
also on blu-ray
16/10/17

**churchill**
also on blu-ray
16/10/17

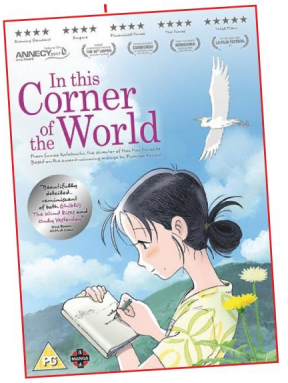
**i am not madame bovary**
out now

**land of mine**
out now



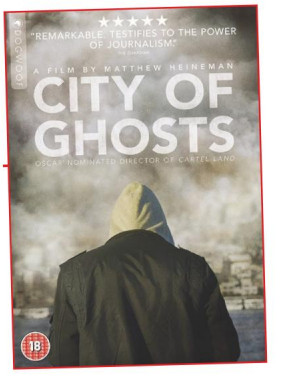
**berlin syndrome**
also on blu-ray
out now

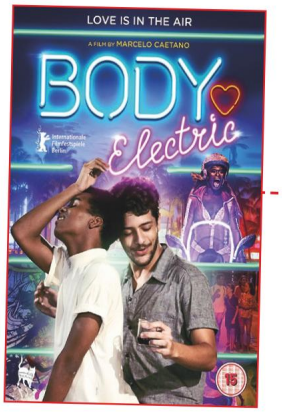
**in this corner of the world**
also on blu-ray
23/10/17



**wonder woman**
also on blu-ray
out now

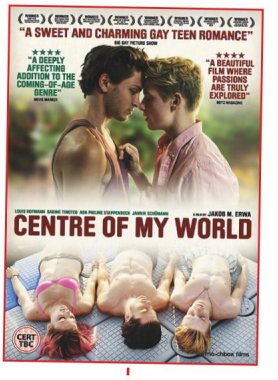
**city of ghosts**
out now



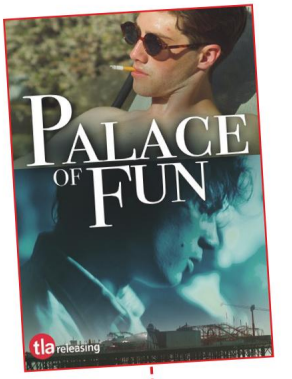




**body electric**
16/10/17

**after the storm**
also on blu-ray
out now




**centre of my world**
out now




**palace of fun**
23/10/17

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# Editorial Nick James

# REACH FOR THE STARS

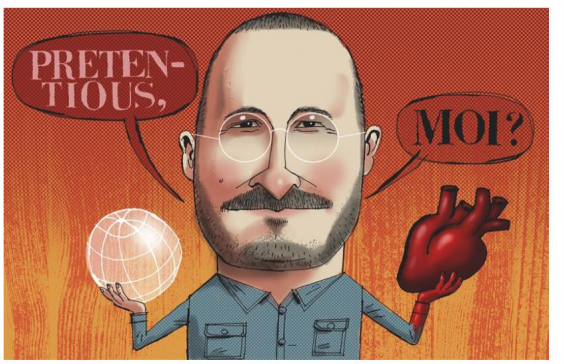
The recent debate about Darren Aronofsky's *mother!* had compound words like 'over-ambitious' and 'overreaching' rattling in my head. I've derided critics in this column before for their use of the word 'pretentious' (though I've also used it at least once myself), and these others are my alternatives. One can criticise a film for being self-indulgent or overweening, but it should be obvious, too, that we want artists of all kinds to strive to go beyond their defined limits and means. A good analysis of why the word should not be used as an insult can be found in the early chapters, particularly, of Dan Fox's *Pretentiousness: Why It Matters*; or one can simply remember the glory who was David Bowie.

*mother!* has been out for a while and the controversy has washed back and forth. Notably, Peter Bradshaw, reviewing it in the *Guardian*, gave the film a five-star recommendation; then, after it had been vilified by a number of other critics and crashed at the box office, Bradshaw wrote a second piece standing up for his choice; and since then critics have rallied to the film's defence. I'm not keen to reopen the argument about its merits or demerits here, other than to say that several of us on *S&S* who saw it admired its ambition but felt it fell clumsily short of its totalising, world's-problems-in-one-nightmare bid for resonance. However, Aronofsky's film has been drawn to my attention again because I'm attending the San Sebastian Film Festival in northern Spain, and two of the first five films I've seen here have one thing in common with *mother!* – they're long, agonising dramas that concern the loss of a child.

I've not been to San Sebastian for six years. Since pretentiousness is on my mind, what's most striking to me this time is how unpretentious the festival is. It is hugely popular with the local and regional population. Queues for films shown in the enormous Kursaal 1 cinema stretch all along the seafront. I am reliably informed that it's a largely conservative crowd, but it's one that will sit still for a 152-minute Romanian film – *Pororoca*, about a man driven to distraction by the disappearance of his daughter when she was under his supervision – and applaud it handsomely at the end.

*Pororoca* is written and directed by Constantin Popescu, and is very much in the recent Romanian tradition of slow-burn, closely observed realist moral tales. I found it to be a more conventional example of this sort of cinema than, say, Cristi Puiu's films. Its long takes, dwelling on its lead character's agony, reveal less than they might. You could say, then, that, while it is powerful, it doesn't overreach itself: my mild disappointment comes from the absence of the kind of aesthetic ambition that stretches both a director and her/his audience.

The second film on the child-loss theme is *A Sort of Family* by the Argentinian director Diego Lerman, in which a doctor in Buenos Aires who has arranged to adopt a child finds that all kinds of barriers emerge the minute the child is born. The film stirs up the many complexities of adoption crises as any powerful, occasionally overwrought melodrama should. It feels very much like the sort of realist, emotionally wrenching film that would go down well in San Sebastian, and I'm sure it has.




*One can criticise a film for being self-indulgent, but it should be obvious that we want artists of all kinds to strive to go beyond their defined limits and means*

Few would accuse either *Pororoca* or *A Sort of Family* of being pretentious: both are recognisably realist films featuring more or less ordinary people as protagonists. But both exhibit the same kind of fear for our children's futures that lies behind *mother!* Which leads me to the key question: in politically darker times, like the ones we're living through, do we fear or dislike art that strives to break new ground or overreaches the artist's capabilities more than usual?

This possibility may have an impact on science fiction films. People are scared by so much of what may happen globally, I'm wondering if a big change in the fortunes of SF movies is looming. If pure fantasy entertainment wins because times are hard and everyone wants escape, then *Blade Runner 2049*'s vision of a ruined earth may fit the bill. But so many of the successful fictional dystopias created in the wake of *1984* have been similar fascist visions full of visible new technology that one wonders if there aren't now a lot of people fed up with the increasingly unfeasible responsibilities of capitalist individualism who're positively willing something vivid like these visions of martial life to happen – in the same way that there are lots of people out there who really do want to meld their bodies with thinking machines.

On the other hand, it may be that in future we'll only believe very realist science fiction projections, ones that we don't want to imagine raising our children in but fear we might have to. In either climate, the accusation of pretentiousness will probably be a serious slur.

ILLUSTRATION BY SIMON COOPER AT WWW.COOPERILLO.COM

# AUTUMN TELEVISION HIGHLIGHTS

### ▲ Auteurs on the small screen

*Alias Grace* is the second Margaret Atwood novel to get the TV series treatment this year (Netflix, on 3 November). Sarah Polley has adapted Atwood's 1996 historical tale about an Irish immigrant servant (above, played by Sarah Gadon) accused of murdering her employers, while *American Psycho*'s Mary Harron directs. TV convert Steven 'movies don't matter anymore' Soderbergh takes on the western genre for the first time with the seven-part *Godless* (Netflix, 22 November). Other filmmakers defecting to the miniseries format include Spike Lee (his first Netflix joint, an adaptation of his 1986 debut *She's Gotta Have It* arrives on 23 November) and John Singleton (his drug drama *Snowfall* lands on BBC2 in October). Meanwhile, David Fincher, who has shown an effortless ability to switch back and forth between the small screen and feature films, brings his serial killer obsession to Netflix with *Mindhunter* (see feature on page 36).

### ▼ Returning favourites

The Brooklyn-set twentysomething mystery *Search Party* (below), one of 2016's best shows, returns to the US this autumn and screens on All4 soon after. Fans of the Stephen King/Spielberg pastiche *Stranger Things* can treat themselves to seconds on Netflix on 27 October. Season four of *Black Mirror* is also due on the streaming giant very soon too.

### ▼ Documentary

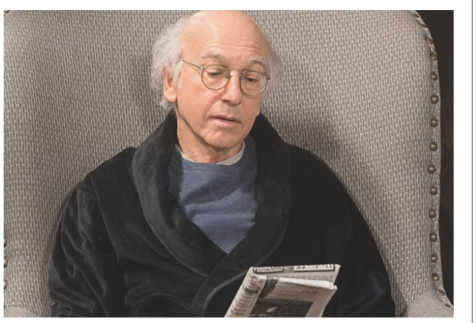
Ken Burns and Lynn Novick's epic 18-hour *The Vietnam War* (now on BBC4), took ten years and $30 million to make and traces the conflict from its colonial roots. Meanwhile Errol Morris mixes drama into his sinister Netflix doc series *Wormwood*, (below, out in December) about a man trying to solve his scientist father's death.

### ▼ VOD movies

In November, don't miss Dee Rees's *Mudbound* (below), her tale of race and poverty in 1940s Mississippi. It's just one of a handful of prestige films on Netflix, alongside Noah Baumbach's *The Meyerowitz Stories (New and Selected)* (see review on page 75) and the Stephen King adaptation *Gerald's Game*. Rep films on the small screen are bountiful too: in October, Mubi UK highlights the films of Miike Takashi and Pablo Larraín, and in November on BFI Player, a collection of newly digitised film and TV explores Jewish life on screen.

### ▶ Comedy

Everyone's favourite misanthrope is back: Larry David and the ninth series of his comedy of social errors *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (right) is out now on Sky Atlantic in the UK, and HBO in the US. Other opportunities for laughs to help lift the winter gloom are the 20th anniversary reunion of *The League of Gentlemen* (Christmas, BBC2) and *The Last O.G.*, the new series from Jordan Peele (*Get Out*), starring *30 Rock*'s Tracy Morgan as an ex-con bewildered by gentrified Brooklyn after a 15-year prison stint (no word on UK screening details yet).



### ▲ Literary adaptations

There's a bonanza of Beeb literary adaptations coming up. Following the rerelease of the classic Merchant Ivory version of E.M. Forster's *Howards End*, BBC1's forthcoming miniseries has a lot to live up to in November – so it's encouraging news that the American director and screenwriter of *Manchester by the Sea*, Kenneth Lonergan, has penned the script. Also airing in November – on BBC2 – is *The Boy with the Topknot* (above), based on Sathnam Sanghera's memoir of his childhood in Wolverhampton. Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* receives yet another outing (Angela Lansbury, Emily Watson and Michael Gambon are among the cast) in December (Greta Gerwig is reportedly scripting a film adaptation too).
*Compiled by Isabel Stevens*

### ▶ Original drama

Keep an eye out for *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (right, due on Amazon in late autumn), which is written and directed by *Gilmore Girls* creator Amy Sherman-Palladino. The dramedy stars Rachel Brosnahan as a 1950s New York Upper West Side housewife who discovers a penchant for stand-up. Amazon will also be launching *Lore*, a horror anthology series based on the popular podcast of the same name and which intriguingly mixes real-life tales of terror, animation, live-action and archival footage. BBC1 has two prestige dramas in the pipeline: *Gunpowder*, about Guy Fawkes's plot, and the military tale *The Last Post* (both starting in October). Netflix's first Italian original series (inevitably a Mafia drama), *Suburra*, has just been released. And David Simon's latest gritty HBO drama *The Deuce* (out now on Sky Atlantic ), which surveys the New York porn industry in the 1970s and stars Maggie Gyllenhaal and James Franco, is well worth a look.

# I PUT A SPELL ON YOU

In her first feature, Zambian-Welsh director Rungano Nyoni has created an angry and darkly funny fairytale about witchcraft in Africa

**By Grace Barber-Plentie**

In *I Am Not a Witch*, the Zambia-set feature debut of Rungano Nyoni, eight-year-old Shula (played by first-time actress Maggie Mulubwa, who was discovered by Nyoni during an arduous casting process) is offered a unique, disturbing choice – declare herself a witch and be cast off into a witch camp, or be turned into a goat. Working with *Embrace of the Serpent* cinematographer David Gallego, Nyoni crafts Shula's dilemma into a modern fairytale, creating striking images of the women in the witch camp tethered by long white ribbons to giant spindles.

But this is no ordinary fairytale – Nyoni combines what may seem like suitable fodder for a children's bedtime story with a wickedly dark sense of humour that she uses to illustrate the ludicrousness of Shula's situation. It's this combination of new-meets-old and fable-meets-social satire that creates a remarkably assured feature debut quite unlike anything else, which showcases Nyoni's distinctive point of view.

**Grace Barber-Plentie: You were born in Zambia but grew up in Wales – do elements of both feed into your work?**

**Rungano Nyoni:** I think they do feed into my filmmaking, whether it's conscious or not, because they've both made up so much of my identity and my life. They both have an effect on how I see the world, and inevitably how I direct.

**GBP: How did you get into cinema? Were there any particular films that inspired you to be a filmmaker?**

**RN:** A film that had a huge effect on me was Michael Haneke's *The Piano Teacher* [2001]. Haneke makes these characters who feel like real people. Isabelle Huppert is a cold bourgeois woman, but when I watch the film she... becomes me, you know? Haneke has been my film school, because I didn't go to film school.

**GBP: How intrinsic to Zambian culture is the idea of witches and witchcraft?**

**RN:** In Zambia, witchcraft is very prominent, even though it's illegal to accuse someone of it. I researched witchcraft in Zambia and Ghana, and my husband and I stayed in a witch camp for a month. But the witchcraft in my film doesn't really reflect reality – I interpreted it in my own way to create my own world. The one thing I wanted to show was how brutal and unfair it was, and how angry it made me.

**GBP: What's your favourite depiction of witchcraft in pop culture?**

**RN:** *The Craft* [1996]. That film is a masterpiece. Me and my friends started dressing like the girls in school.

**GBP: Why did you choose to use humour and satire in the film?**

**RN:** I used comedy to try and engage people. Zambian humour is unique, a bit cruel and dark... Zambians can laugh at anything. The humour plays around with the darkness a lot, and is really inappropriate, but that's how we deal with life.

The kid stays in the picture: Maggie Mulubwa as Shula, threatened with goathood, in *I Am Not a Witch*

**GBP: The film was funded by bodies including the BFI and Film4. Were you worried that the uniqueness of the film would put off funders?**

**RN:** I didn't have time to think about it. I was so convinced that everyone was going to say no to me. I remember I went to a funding meeting and I was listening to Notorious B.I.G, ready to fight for my corner, preparing this monologue in my head... but then they said yes and I didn't have to fight. I was really lucky. There was this whole move for diversity, and I came at the right time.

**GBP: I hate to ask the diversity question, but do you think things really are changing?**

**RN:** We're only going to know in 10 years' time. It's great that films like *Moonlight* [2016] and *Get Out* have happened, and *Wonder Woman*... all of it's fantastic, but will they be remembered? The film industry is one of the only industries that gets away with being sexist and racist – we're all meant to be liberals, but we're working in one of the least diverse industries.

*Zambians can laugh at anything. The humour plays around with the darkness a lot, but that's how we deal with life*

**GBP: Do you want to be known as a black female director or let your work speak for itself?**

**RN:** I can't escape my blackness, it's part of me. It's strange realising that race and my vagina have a huge effect on people, and I can't escape that. I don't mind if that's how people want to refer to me, as long as that's not the only thing I am. I just don't want to only be thought of as a black filmmaker only making black films. I don't want to feel limited.

**GBP: For a first feature, it's incredible how precise and distinct *I Am Not a Witch* feels. Did you know exactly how you wanted the film to look and sound?**

**RN:** I didn't. David Gallego, my cinematographer, and I both wanted it to look like a fairytale.

The uses of enchantment: witches, tied by white ribbons, in *I Am Not a Witch*

It couldn't be subtle – there is nothing subtle about any of the shots. We stuck to simplicity, that was really important. With music, I wanted it to be classical because I wanted it to be really bombastic, and kitsch. I wanted that to exaggerate the image.

**GBP: The scene where you use 'American Boy' by Estelle is great – so unexpected, and very dark.**

**RN:** 'American Boy' was the only song I already had written in the script. It's really difficult to find a song that doesn't sound dated, but 'American Boy' is great. It's timeless.

**GBP: What do you plan to do next?**

**RN:** I'm going to Toronto Film Festival next week, and the London Film Festival... then the film is released in the UK. In terms of what I'm working on, I'm on the look-out for stories I can change and adapt. I'm really interested in black British experiences in Victorian times. I'd love to do something in Wales... maybe with serial killers?

***I Am Not a Witch* is released in UK cinemas on 20 October and is reviewed on page 70**

Rungano Nyoni

## THE NUMBERS
## GOD'S OWN COUNTRY

**By Charles Gant**

**When Picturehouse Entertainment acquired Francis Lee's *God's Own Country* at the Sundance Film Festival, the commercial precedents for contemporary British gay dramas were not that encouraging. The surprise breakout success of recent years, Andrew Haigh's *Weekend* (2011), got to £222,000 at UK cinemas, while more recent titles such as *Lilting* (2014) and *The Pass* (2015) have fallen short of that tally.**

**But Picturehouse felt Lee's film represented an opportunity to break out beyond the LGBT audience, and also the audience for gritty contemporary British drama, given what the company's distribution boss Nick McKay calls its "openness and hopefulness".**

**The first important decision was the release date, which would dictate the festival strategy. Picturehouse recognised the dangers of the bottleneck that can occur after October's BFI London Film Festival, and identified September as the perfect post-summer slot. As McKay explains, "September traditionally was always marked as a dumping ground for studio films that didn't make the summer tentpole A grade, but in recent years it's become an opportunity for films like *Winter's Bone* [2010] and *Gomorrah* [2008] and larger-scale British productions such as *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* and *Rush* [both 2011]. The tide does go out a bit before the LFF, and there's an opportunity to get in, following the summer." The opening slot at Edinburgh in June became the UK launchpad, and *God's Own Country* went on to win the Michael Powell Award at the festival.**

**Picturehouse had witnessed Lee's effectiveness with post-film Q&As at Sundance and Berlin, and identified the director's willingness to hit the road with a pre-release UK tour, taking in key cities from Newcastle to Brighton. Support for the release came from the BFI's Audience Fund and the independently operated but BFI-backed Film Audience Network via its New Release Strategy.**

Yorkshire grit: *God's Own* Country

**Crucially, the BFI was willing to back Picturehouse's relatively modest strategy of releasing on at least 30 cinemas in week one, expanding to at least 45 thereafter. "Thankfully there's a more holistic view at the fund now that the market is challenging," McKay says. "It's about what's right for the film, it's not about a volume or hitting the widest point of release as soon as possible on week one."**

**As the release date drew near, and the buzz on the film grew, Picturehouse added more sites, opening *God's Own Country* in 45 cinemas, and achieving a screen average above £3,000 – increasingly rare for an indie title. Exhibitors responded with enthusiasm and the film expanded to 101 cinemas in week two. After 26 days, the film had reached £662,000.**

**Helping *God's Own Country* cross over into more mainstream terrain, especially on social media, was the 'Brokeback Yorkshire' tag that was quickly attached – not encouraged by Picturehouse or Lee, but not exactly discouraged either. "If the press were going to talk about it, we would be mindful of it," says McKay, "but not necessarily echo it to a significant point. It was a positive association that just ran parallel with everything we were doing. What was interesting was the broader range of outlets who got on board with the film early on. With the *Brokeback* angle, there was an interested press willing to have a look at the film, and then the film's quality did the rest."**

### BRITISH GAY-MALE-THEMED TITLES AT THE UK BOX OFFICE

| Film | Year | Gross |
|---|---|---|
| The History Boys | 2006 | £4,344,179 |
| Pride | 2014 | £4,100,871 |
| Wilde | 1997 | £1,877,942 |
| Priest | 1995 | £1,047,332 |
| God's Own Country | 2017 | £662,343* |
| Beautiful Thing | 1996 | £479,798 |
| Love and Death on Long Island | 1998 | £394,372 |
| Lawless Heart | 2002 | £321,262 |
| Weekend | 2011 | £221,621 |
| Get Real | 1999 | £151,411 |
| Lilting | 2014 | £132,670 |

*gross at press time

# STATS OF THE NATION

The numbers are in, and the figures for women in feature film production are predictably dismal – but that's not the whole story

**By Pamela Hutchinson**

The launch of the BFI Filmography offers a chance to interrogate our cinematic past, learn from it, and change our future. This new searchable website is the fruit of five years' work analysing the BFI's database of film credits. The Filmography data comprises credits for more than 10,000 British feature films, from 1911's *Rob Roy* to the present, a number that is growing every week, release by release, with each new entry having the opportunity to shift the overall numbers in a different direction. By applying a variety of filters and searches to the data on the Filmography website, the curious reader can follow up on personal hunches or long-pondered questions, entering a matrix of correlation, coincidence and, just possibly, entrenched institutional bias. As far as the participation of women in the British feature film goes, the data initially appears to be stark, depressing and flat as a pancake.

Perusing the data, we learn that overall, just one per cent of the films have had a majority female crew. Also, that the proportion of women on screen was 31 per cent in 1913 and that so far 2017 can only muster 30 per cent. The proportion of women behind the camera in British feature film production has risen since 1913, however, from three per cent to 34 per cent. When you picture it across 104 years, though, that statistic hardly represents a rush of talent into the industry. The team behind the database has so far inferred the gender, based on first names, of about 91 per cent of credited individuals. One of the major factors weighting the data in favour of male personnel seems to be that men on average have longer, fuller careers in film. Britain's most prolific director, for example, is Maurice Elvey, with 151 credits, but his closest female competitor is Muriel Box, with just 13 movies to her name.

If we begin at the beginning, the story of Britain's first credited female feature film director has a lot to tell us about how women enter the film industry, how long they get to stay, and the debates that surround their very existence. Dinah Shurey directed, wrote and produced the naval melodrama *Carry On!* in 1927. She had produced one feature previously, 1926's *Second to None*, having founded her own production and distribution companies in 1924. Impressive as these achievements are, it should be remembered that Shurey had predecessors in short-form films, including Ethyle Batley, and film history records her as neither a pioneer nor a great talent: the filmmaker and critic Paul Rotha remembered her as having "made some quite atrocious films". News that Shurey was about to step into the role of director was not even welcomed at the time. Writing in the *Film Spectator* in 1927, Cedric Belfrage described her as "a rather rich amateur whose damage to innocent celluloid has already been appalling". *Carry On!* appears to be lost, as is Shurey's second directorial effort, another war drama called *The Last Post* (1930), so we may have to take the word of contemporaries and critics and write her off as a duffer. The story is more complicated than that, though, as Christine Gledhill's research has revealed. The critic Iris Barry mentioned Shurey approvingly in a list of international female directors, noting that women have "visual minds and care for detail"; by contrast, Nerina Shute, a journalist not known for mincing her words, castigated the director in *Film Weekly* after the release of *The Last Post*: "It is pathetically obvious that women can't produce films. In England only one lady has had the temerity to try. Dina [sic] Shurey (who will go to heaven by reason of her great courage) has created several appalling pictures... [Critics] can't fail to admire her good intentions, and yet..."

Shurey sued for libel, and won, on the grounds that she was heavily involved in several aspects of film production and the term "appalling pictures" was blatantly a bit vicious. Her career in film was over, though – a shame, whatever the quality of her work. Both of Shurey's films were collaborations with screenwriter Lydia Hayward (joint third, with Alma Reville, in the list of most prolific female screenwriters of British feature films) and *The Last Post* shares with Elinor Glyn's *The Price of Things* (1931) the rare distinction, within the BFI data, of having an all-female crew (though admittedly from a very limited dataset, with each director filling three of just four listed crew roles on their respective films). *Carry On!*, meanwhile, was made by a 75 per cent female team. Throughout the Filmography data, this fact asserts itself: when a film is written, directed and produced by women, the rest of the crew tends to contain more women.

*The data shows that when a film is written, directed and produced by women, the rest of the crew tends to contain more women*

Shurey, who had volunteered with the French Red Cross during World War I, surprised critics by making military films. But why shouldn't she? We can now see that war is the sixth most popular genre in British feature film history (though heavily overshadowed by comedy, drama and crime), and it was relevant to Shurey's own experience. When we look at the career of Muriel Box, subject matter is of even more pressing

## MOST PROLIFIC BRITISH DIRECTORS

**Men**

| | |
|---|---|
| Maurice Elvey | 151 films |
| Maclean Rogers | 80 |
| Leslie Hiscott | 62 |
| Henry Edwards | 61 |
| Thomas Bentley | 56 |

**Women**

| | |
|---|---|
| 13 | Muriel Box |
| 8 | Sally Potter |
| 7 | Gurinder Chadha |
| 7 | Christine Edzard |
| 6 | Wendy Toye (right) |
| 6 | Mira Nair |

Muriel Box

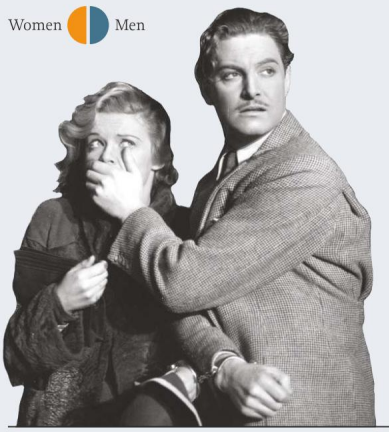
Sally Potter

Gurinder Chadha

**Dinah Shurey** is Britain's first credited female director. Her film *The Last Post* is one of only two films in the BFI database with a **100% female crew**

ILLUSTRATION CONTENT: ADAM FROST / DESIGN: MELANIE PATRICK

## GENDER BALANCE: CAST AND CREW 1911–2017



Women Men

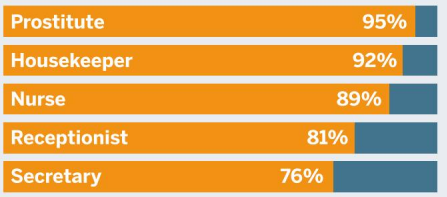
* Unresolved gender: 5% for all credited roles; 2% cast; 7% crew

In 1913, women made up **31%** of UK film casts
In 2017, women make up **30%**

## THE JOBS WOMEN HAVE ON SCREEN CONFORM TO STEREOTYPE*

* Unnamed characters in UK films who are referenced only by their job titles. Gendered characters (eg, 'brother') omitted.

Examples of occupations that are likely to be played by women

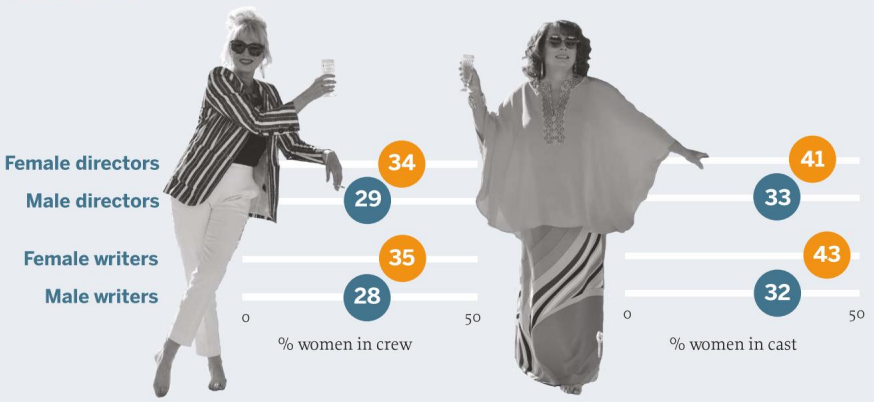



Examples of occupations that are unlikely to be played by women

## IF WOMEN ARE IN CONTROL, THE GENDER BALANCE SHIFTS*

If a film has a female writer AND a female director, the situation improves even further, with **36%** of women in the crew and **45%** of women in the cast.

* Gender balance in films from 1990s onwards




ALAMY (1) BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (3)

importance. Box was a former 'continuity girl' (aka script supervisor, one of the most gendered roles on set, as it once required shorthand and typing). She became a screenwriter, then head of Gainsborough's scenario department and assistant director, before directing her first film, *The Happy Family*, in 1952 (after a co-directing credit in 1949 for *The Lost People*). She was lucky to have the support of her first husband, producer Sydney Box, and throughout the 50s and early 60s she made films on politics and issues close to the 'female experience', such as teenage sex, abortion, venereal disease and illegitimacy. There's a parallel to the work of Lois Weber and Ida Lupino, similarly socially conscious female directors in the US. One senses that Box knew she had a rare opportunity as a female director and didn't want to waste it on mere entertainment, even if that meant sacrificing commercial success to social good.

Twenty years after Shurey's efforts, and with far better reviews, Box still found herself at the centre of debates about whether women could direct films, and noted with some anguish that stars and producers tried to have her removed from their projects. The title of her autobiography speaks volumes: *Odd Woman Out*. She writes there that she was inspired by Virginia Woolf's 'A Room of One's Own' in her twenties: "I had been possessed ever since with a strong urge to support the cause of equality between the sexes... Unable to chain myself to the railings, I could at least rattle the film chains!" After encountering so much resistance in this role, no doubt she had plenty of enthusiasm for her second career as a feminist publisher.

The legacy of both women can be seen not just in the rising number of female directors in the early part of the 21st century, but in their motivation to work and to rattle those chains. Gurinder Chadha, who with seven films is Britain's second most prolific living female feature director (after Sally Potter), spoke at the launch of the BFI Filmography data, saying she wanted to enter the film business to "restore a balance". She admitted it could be a struggle to make films like hers, which prioritise female and British-Asian narratives, but that as "film reflects who we are" she would continue: "The tragedy is that our stories aren't there." Chadha's peers in the list of prolific female directors include such avowedly feminist filmmakers as Potter and Laura Mulvey, women such as Andrea Arnold and Lynne Ramsay who create female-led narratives in a socially realist mould, and documentary makers. Documentary filmmaking is the field in which the number of women behind the camera is rising most rapidly, even if it seems that the majority of their subjects are male. The most popular word in the titles of all those 10,000-plus British features is 'man', after all, with 'girl', followed by 'woman', trailing far behind.

While the statistics around women in film initially seem depressingly static, there is hope in these numbers. As those chains continue to rattle in the ears of executives, producers and directors, each subsequent feature film made in this country has the opportunity to shift the gender balance, and the data, towards parity. It has taken 104 years to climb from three per cent to 34 per cent: now it's time for a final sprint towards equality.

**For more details, see www.bfi.org.uk/archive-collections/bfi-filmography**

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# OUT OF AFRICA

After years of detective work, 24 lost African classics are screening at film festivals around the UK – there's no excuse not to dive in

**By Mark Cousins**

In the UK this autumn, Lazarus-like, films that have effectively been dead are returning to life and screening at a series of festivals of African cinema.

The story begins eleven years ago, when the South African film scholar Lizelle Bisschoff established the Africa in Motion film festival in Scotland. She was soon joined by David Murphy of the University of Stirling, who had written the best book on Ousmane Sembène, and others (I was slightly involved too). From the start they showed new films, but also classics from the vast continent's movie past, the idea being that most film fans hadn't seen many of the milestones of African cinema.

It quickly became clear that many of these great old movies were beyond reach, because prints were in poor condition or lost, or because they had been given little distribution, or their filmmakers had been written out of film history, or their work had been actively repressed. The result was a double loss: forgotten films from a continent whose whole filmic output had been sequestered.

Unprepared to accept this situation, Bisschoff, Murphy, their colleagues, and similarly minded people from Afrika Eye in Bristol, the Cambridge African Film Festival, Film Africa in London and Watch-Africa in Wales drew on the pioneering work of film curator June Givanni in the UK, and the big-scale efforts of the World Cinema Foundation, spearheaded by Martin Scorsese, to restore and screen apparently unavailable work. Calling the films 'classics' was a conscious act of canon formation, of storytelling within film history. Faced with unfamiliar film cultures, Western movie fans sometimes don't know where to start. A canon forms a must-see list for them, a list that, once the films are in the conversation, can be challenged. The work of historians such as Frank Ukadike, Roy Armes, Jacqueline Maingard and many others means that if film fans in the 21st century haven't seen, say, *Yeelen* (Mali, 1987) by Souleymane Cissé, or Sembène's *Xala* (Senegal, 1975), they haven't been paying attention.

These last two films are now widely available, but the 24 African films screened this autumn will be shown as a result of detective work and cultural excavation. Some, such as Djibril Diop Mambéty's sexy, jazzy, irreverent *Touki Bouki* (Senegal, 1973) and Ahmed El Maanouni's trippy, swirling *Trances* (Morocco, 1981), arrive courtesy of Scorsese's efforts, while Med Hondo's fantastic *Soleil O* (Mauritania, 1969) and Mohamed Lakhdar-Hamina's vast *Chronicle of the Years of Embers* (Algeria, 1975) are already much discussed. But what of Selma Baccar's *Fatma '75* (Tunisia, 1976), the first documentary by a Tunisian woman? Or *The Sandwich* (1978), a short Egyptian documentary by the award-winning Attiyat El

ILLUSTRATION BY NATE KITCH

*If you've seen 'Star Wars' but not its trippy, labyrinthine sister film 'Yeelen', you aren't as curious about film as you think*

Abnoudy? I've seen neither, nor most of the films in the season. I recently managed to watch – and loved – *Mossane* (1996) by the great Senegalese director Safi Faye, but there's so much beyond my ken in Africa's Lost Classics and, as I kept saying when I was writing *The Story of Film*, it's my ignorance which drives me. I can't wait to see what I haven't seen, and discover stuff I didn't know.

For example, as seven of the lost classics are from the 1970s – the above mentioned, plus Mambéty's *Badou Boy* (1970), Louis De Witt's *Joe Bullet* (1973) from South Africa, and Ruy Guerra's *Mueda, Memory and Massacre* (1979) from Mozambique – they might allow us to rethink that over-discussed decade in film history. Similarly, the 1990s were a golden age in world cinema but, with seven African films from that decade about to be shown – *Flame* (1996) by Ingrid Sinclair from Zimbabwe; *La Femme mariée à trois hommes* (1993) by Danièle Roy and Cilia Sawadogo from Burkina Faso; *Living in Bondage* by Chris Obi Rapu from Nigeria (1992); Faye's *Mossane*; *Rage* (1999) by Newton Aduaka from Nigeria; *Toad Visits His In-Laws* (1991) by Jean-Michel Kibushi from Democratic Republic of Congo; and *Women with Open Eyes* (1994) by Anne-Laure Folly from Togo – our sense of 90s cinema could be augmented. And you'll have noticed how many of these films were directed by women; significant at a time of new activism in that area.

For decades I and many others have been angry at the amnesia about African cinema. I've sometimes called it racism by omission. Reading the Africa's Lost Classics list I felt less anger than relief. Few African films get distribution in the UK, and it is reported that the biennial Fespaco film festival in Ouagadougou, for many years the mecca for African film, is in decline. Yet the arrival of these classics in cinemas across the UK shows that walls can come tumbling down. It'll be a long time before African directors achieve parity of recognition, support and esteem, but what a lot can be achieved by dogged researchers with an arts and humanities research grant to the University of Glasgow.

Let's put this bluntly: you don't know cinema if you don't know African cinema. If you've seen *Star Wars* (1977) but not its trippy, labyrinthine sister film *Yeelen*, you aren't as curious about film as you think. If you are interested in women in film and have seen nothing by Safi Faye, try harder and don't blame others. Some of her work is online. Ask a distributor or TV programmer why they don't show African films and they might answer "because there's no audience". Can we prove them wrong?

**'Africa's Lost Classics' screen at the Afrika Eye festival in Bristol (11-13 November), the Cambridge African Film Festival (19-26 October), London's Film Africa (27 October – 5 November), Scotland's Africa in Motion (27 October – 5 November) and Watch-Africa in Wales (23 October – 12 November)**

VENICE

# CREATURE COMFORTS

Sexy beast: Sally Hawkins as Elisa in Guillermo del Toro's labyrinthine and unorthodox love story *The Shape of Water*

Despite an enticing line-up, Venice failed fully to catch fire this year, though a trio of fabulous films helped lift the spirits

**By Nick James**

Figuring out in advance which autumn festival has the best line-up has become difficult. When Venice published its programme it looked as if it had aced the pack, but it didn't live up to its cool-hand promise – at least as far as the works I saw. Of the three outstanding films it had, two were shown in the first couple of days – Lucrecia Martel's *Zama* (shown out of competition) and Guillermo del Toro's Golden Lion winner *The Shape of Water* – leaving it with nowhere to go quality-wise but gently downhill, until Martin McDonagh's *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* gave it a brief lift.

More than ever this year Venice crammed its main programme with US films, a significant strain of which were preaching about the devaluation of the American Dream and the perils of the age. Alexander Payne's likeable *Downsizing*, the festival's opener, was one such, an elaborate Capraesque social satire centred on a new technology designed to alleviate the strain on the world's resources. Citizens seeking a better bang for their buck are shrunk to around five inches so they can live the life of Riley in specially constructed communities. Average everyman Paul Safranek (Matt Damon) is tempted because he and his wife Audrey (Kristen Wiig) are struggling to move up, and former friends who've done it seem happy. Once Paul is shrunk, however, we're into a tadpole-out-of-water tale that relies on his apparent fear of and fascination with hedonistic Europeans – Christoph Waltz as Dusan, his Serbian neighbour, for instance – which may chime with Americans, but is a bit of a yawn for everyone else. Though cute surprises keep coming, the concept's flimsiness becomes all too apparent.

By contrast, Paul Schrader's *First Reformed* doesn't initially look as if it will have anything to say about the wider world. It begins as a film of intense Bressonian existential focus, with Ethan Hawke playing Ernst Toller, an austere pastor who's wracked with guilt over his son's death in Iraq. Another of Schrader's 'God's lonely men', Toller keeps a ruthlessly honest diary to chronicle his many failings. What kicks him out of his solitude is Mary (Amanda Seyfried), a pregnant parishioner seeking advice about her troubled environmental activist husband Michael (Philip Ettinger). Toller counsels Michael, but later finds a suicide vest in the couple's garage, after which the film takes on a more cosmic and political dimension, but with less success. Schrader's yen for the sensational eventually shreds the carefully constructed drama to produce a near-preposterous ending.

All I have to say about Darren Aronofsky's *mother!* is that it's an allegorical roundelay haunted house end-of-the-world movie about a woman married to a monstrous egomaniac, which could only have been conceived by someone who knows what he's talking about. As the *Rosemary's Baby*-like concept is slowly abandoned and all the world's problems come crashing into the couple's isolated house, all I could hear were Kafka and Buñuel pleading for mercy in their graves.

The animated architects' drawings that open *Suburbicon*, George Clooney's take on an old Coen brothers' script, create a comfortable familiarity – for who has not seen satirical films set at the height of the American empire, or associated Clooney with 50s and 60s period pieces? Matt Damon plays bank employee Gardner Lodge; with Julianne Moore as both his wheelchair-bound wife Rose and her sister Margaret. We see events through the eyes of Gardner and Rose's son Nicky (Noah Jupe), who one night is told to get out of bed because "there are men in the house",

*'The Shape of Water' mixes romance, B-movie mystery, creature-feature fun, film noir psychosis and the odd sick joke*

and is then forced to witness his mother's death by chloroform. Nicky soon realises his father may not be the paragon he seems, while an insurance agent believes the perpetrators of Rose's death may not be random intruders. A more intimate *Fargo* (1995), in which incompetence piles on incompetence, *Suburbicon*'s dark comedy plays entertainingly enough, but it lacks the panache of the Coens' best films, and a social conscience sub-plot involving the Lodges' African-American neighbours simply doesn't work.

The sharper journey into twisted laughs came from *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*. Mildred Hayes (Frances McDormand) is a hard-bitten mother who carries so much resentment over the murder of her teenage daughter that she sets herself against her entire small town by renting three billboards to paint with messages: 'Raped While Dying', 'And Still No Arrests', 'How Come Chief Willoughby?' It's her implacability in her quest for justice that underpins McDonagh's cutting instinct for laughs, with its mocking of PC moralism (there are a lot of midget jokes, for instance). The poignancy necessary to outweigh such liberal baiting comes in the form of two cops: Chief Willoughby (Woody Harrelson), beloved by the townsfolk, who is dying of cancer; and Dixon (Sam Rockwell), a ball of ignorance who has only just been cleared of a racist torture charge. But neither his character nor the revenge narrative plays out as predicted and instead we're treated to a nuanced morality play that mocks itself but leaves plenty of space for serious emotional resonances.

*Suburbicon* and *Three Billboards* both have shocking moments of violence, but their grisly scenes are nothing compared with the skull-stomping aggression in S. Craig Zahler's grindhouse thriller *Brawl in Cell Block 99*. The most resonant scenes are those in the prologue, in which Bradley Thomas (a shaven-headed, muscle-bound Vince Vaughn) arrives at work to find his fellow workers gathered outside to help the boss tell this ticking bomb of a man he can no longer afford to employ him. Brad takes the news without flinching, but is soon spying on his wife, trying to confirm his suspicion that she's having an affair. Happily, he takes his rage out not on her but on her car, ripping it apart with his bare hands. He then engages in a new career as a drug courier, from which moment the actual plot of the film spins out. I cared little about this ultra-violent latter part, but I can say it is beautifully put together.

There is even a dark American underbelly element to del Toro's big romantic coup *The Shape of Water*, but before that there's a set-up full of whimsy in which Elisa (Sally Hawkins), a mute lover of old Hollywood musicals who lives above a cinema next door to Giles (Richard Jenkins), a self-dramatising gay advertising illustrator in the Norman Rockwell vein. Its time-warp 40s-in-the-60s enchantment initially seems straight out of Jeunet and Caro's *Delicatessen* (1990), but the kookiness soon calms down in favour of Hollywood romance, B-movie mystery, creature-feature fun, *film noir* psychosis and the occasional sick joke – it's a cinephile obsessive's wet dream.

Elisa, you see, works as a cleaner in an aerospace industry facility, where she witnesses

**Of horses and men: Lucrecia Martel's Zama, a beguiling existential tale set in 18th-century Paraguay**

CIA agent Strickland (Michael Shannon) bringing in a creature not unlike one from the Black Lagoon, which he tortures and wants dissected. But Elisa finds that the monster likes boiled eggs and showtunes, and she is beginning to get a bit of a crush because she realises 'it' doesn't care that she can't speak. The plot is lightly labyrinthine and goes by like the breeze.

A small clutch of films about ageing did their best to appeal. *Our Souls at Night* (a hostage to mispronunciation if ever there was one) pairs Robert Redford with Jane Fonda in a late-life romance as banal and bathetic as it sounds. Paolo Virzi's *The Leisure Seeker* had a bit more life and realism to it, following a tough Southern wife (Helen Mirren) whose academic husband (Donald Sutherland) is in the early stages of dementia, yet still competent enough to drive their old Leisure Seeker mobile home south away from their fretting children. But it was still a catalogue of clichés about ageing worth nothing but a wan smile.

Much better was Robert Guédiguian's *La Villa*, in which a fractured community of old friends and relations gathers in a seaside village after their paterfamilias suffers a stroke. I wanted to eulogise this distinctly old-fashioned film, with its intricate, nuanced sets of relations, very much in the mould of the director's other work, but its sentimental ending is ruinous.

Two documentaries stood out, though both had weaknesses. So distinctive are Fred Wiseman's films that you can only really compare one with another. On that basis *Ex Libris*, his film about the New York Public Library system, though as thoroughgoing as ever, seemed less revelatory than *At Berkeley* (2013) or *National Gallery* (2014). The members of staff

***Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri***

who speak in bureaucratic meetings seem too well rehearsed and there is hardly any dispute between them on show. One gets a strong sense of good people trying to get the best out of the public-private funding arrangements, but the tangential relief provided by library events featuring the likes of Elvis Costello and Richard Dawkins proves all too necessary.

A panorama of nearly all the major migratory encampments and destroyed places people flee from, Ai Weiwei's *Human Flow* is an installation documentary masquerading as a feature film. By that I mean it has no real beginning, middle or end, but cares that you register how vast and terrible the situation is. Individuals in places such as Gaza, Southern Sahara, Lesbos and Calais provide eloquent testimony, or suffer on camera, often comforted by the artist himself. There's an aesthetic emphasis on the beauty of landscapes – sandstorms, the rolling sea, etc – and the film seems alternately to want to soothe its audience to a rational calm to imbibe chilling statistics, and then prod us with profound grief. It feels prettified and somehow self-aggrandising – and why did the artist have to appear in it, especially in the heroic contexts of dishing out aid and comfort?

You'll have noticed that all the films I've discussed so far are in English. The one exception I want to include is the fever-dream epic *Zama*. The rare distinction of Martel's features – from *La Ciénaga* (2001) to *The Headless Woman* (2008) – is such that one would never usually cite another director's work in reference to hers. But this adaptation of Antonio di Benedetto's existential 1956 novel, an 18th-century period piece set in Paraguay, evinces a mood which, though akin to the strangeness of the hotel in *The Holy Girl* (2004), is also strongly reminiscent of the feeling of poetic disjuncture in Werner Herzog's *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974) – a mood of somnolent, uncomprehending wonder, as our protagonist Zama, a stranded official waiting for a transfer, experiences his life as a series of random, mildly shocking events that never climax or complete. It's a rich visual tapestry of South American colonial life as self-mythologising fable, a haunting work that gets into your bones. It is also *Sight & Sound*'s Special Presentation on 14-15 October at the BFI London Film Festival. Do see it if you can.

# TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Even with the number of films cut by a fifth at Toronto this year, there was an embarrassment of riches – but a few key problems remain

**By Tom Charity**

Screenings at the 42nd annual Toronto International Film Festival were preceded by a tribute to co-founder Bill Marshall, who passed away in January and was remembered here with affection.

Back in its first iteration, in 1976, the 'Festival of Festivals' attracted an audience of 35,000 to 127 movies; the most notable guests, Jack Nicholson and Julie Christie, were no-shows. Today TIFF brings in so many movie stars they probably outnumber those left behind in Los Angeles, and attendance is put at more than 380,000 tickets.

And yet there is trouble in paradise. TIFF's five-screen artplex, the Bell Lightbox, has not matched audience projections and posted a 27 per cent drop in 2016. After years of expansion, the festival cut back its slate by 20 per cent across the board this year (affecting everything save biopics, which proliferate like bindweed). Then, on the eve of the festival, CEO Piers Handling, who has been in post for 23 years, announced that next year would be his last in the job. His resignation comes after a wave of defections from the organisation and media reports claiming Handling is the best paid non-profit CEO in Canada.

TIFF's leaner look is no bad thing, and it's still an embarrassment of riches. This year's line-up boasted the usual mix: the cream of Cannes, the autumn harvest of Oscar-bait, international art films (many of them arriving by way of Venice and/or Telluride), late-night schlock, experimenta, and Canadian cinema for those who like that sort of thing. (Shout out here to Kathleen Hepburn's stark portrait of rural lives on the edge of nothingness, *Never Steady, Never Still*, with Shirley Henderson, one of the best Canadian debuts in recent years).

The UK film industry was out in full force: Film4 came away with the plum People's Choice Award for Martin McDonagh's scalding comedy *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (richly deserved, I thought). There were not one but two self-scripted Ian McEwan adaptations. *On Chesil Beach* tries hard to marry romantic flashbacks to a wedding night nightmare but fumbles its lines along the way; Richard Eyre's excellent *The Children Act* scarcely puts a foot wrong and features peak Emma Thompson as a high court judge who becomes the unexpected fixation of teenage infatuation.

Clio Barnard and Andrew Haigh premiered *Dark River* and *Lean on Pete*, respectively, to muted approval. Barnard falls prey to traumatic flashbacks in her tale of grown siblings fighting over the fate of the Yorkshire sheep farm they inherit from an abusive father. Haigh's first American-set film, meanwhile, is a linear, Loachian cautionary tale about an enterprising kid running away from the authorities after his father is killed. The title refers to the racehorse the lad takes a shine to when he gets a job helping out Steve Buscemi's cynical track

**The fugitive kind: Warwick Thornton's searing outback western *Sweet Country***

*'Sweet Country' summons the accumulated grievances of colonial racism across the centuries and across continents*

veteran. There is good work here, but the movie is running on empty well before the finish line.

Finally Armando Iannucci successfully broadens and deepens his scope with *The Death of Stalin*, a characteristically vicious but all too plausible satire focusing on the Communist Party Central Committee's Machiavellian manoeuvres when Uncle Joe goes into cardiac arrest. Buscemi's terrific here too, as Nikita Khrushchev, engaged in a battle of wits and corpses with Simon Russell Beale's ruthless Beria. It's a film to whet the appetite for Iannucci's inevitable and eagerly awaited companion piece, a Swiftian chronicle of el Trumpo's short-lived presidency.

Like *Dark River* and *The Death of Stalin*, Xavier Legrand's French drama *Custody* (*Jusqu'à la garde*) screened in the Platform sidebar, a boutique competitive section that throws a welcome spotlight on fare that risks being overlooked amid the hoopla. A sharp, unsentimental film about a volatile dad (Denis Ménochet) who becomes increasingly menacing as his ex-wife tries to keep him at arm's length from her kids, this goes where you fear it must, but keeps our emotions on the boil throughout. The Platform prize-winner (bestowed by a jury comprising Chen Kaige, Malgorzata Szumowska and Wim Wenders) was *Sweet Country*, by Warwick Thornton (*Samson and Delilah*, 2009), an outback western based on an incident in Australia's Northern Territory in 1929, but summoning the accumulated grievances of colonial racism across the centuries and indeed across continents. Thornton doesn't just give us the story from an aboriginal perspective, he also shoots time and place in searing compositions reminiscent of Nicolas Roeg's *Walkabout* (1970).

**Xavier Legrand's *Custody***

The Fipresci (International Federation of Film Critics) Discovery prize went to Sadaf Foroughi, an Iranian now settled in Montreal, for her debut feature *Ava*, a piquant film about a teenage schoolgirl in Tehran acting out against the proscriptions of her mother and teachers. Her defiance seems minor in a Western context, but the consequences soon stack up.

Koreeda Hirokazu takes a new tack with his latest film, *The Third Murder*, a psychological mystery about a defence lawyer confounded by his client, a convicted killer who has confessed to murdering his ex-employer, but whose story keeps changing. It's a compelling, knotty but overlong thriller that risks upsetting the director's admirers with its more cynical view of humanity.

Although it's his first film set outside Africa, Chadian director Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's *A Season in France* is of a piece with the compassion that runs through all his work. An immigrant's view of the refugee 'crisis', this simple but overwhelming movie burns with righteous indignation and a grievous sense of loss.

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PREVIEW

# A TASTE OF FLESH

The US sexploitation flicks of the 60s were quick ways of turning a buck – and sometimes, too, funny, artful and audacious

**By Elena Gorfinkel**

Aside from the recognition bestowed on Russ Meyer and Radley Metzger, American sexploitation films and their makers for many years languished in a nether-zone. Neither as aesthetically daring as the contemporaneous underground films that experimented with queer sexuality (such as those of Andy Warhol, Jack Smith or Barbara Rubin), nor as modern as the erotically tinged international New Waves, sexploitation films occupy a peculiar place in an understanding of 1960s film culture. Sexploitation is essential to the history of 1960s film experience, but peripheral in its legitimacy as cinema in its own right, frequently discounted as bad art or failed porn.

In the 1960s, hundreds of sexploitation films were produced in the US on budgets averaging $10,000-40,000, on quick production schedules, mainly by outfits on the East and West coasts. This cottage industry developed due to a variety of factors, including changing obscenity laws that ruled nudity no longer obscene, the impact of studio divestiture (after a 1948 Supreme Court ruling forced studios to sell their interests in cinemas), and the subsequent availability of neighbourhood screens. The earliest entries were the innocuous 'nudie cuties', shot in full colour in Florida and California, Meyer's *The Immoral Mr. Teas* (1959) being the first: hapless middle-aged men, royal schmucks who stumbled through creaky plots that emphasised the everyman's ability to see women in the nude through various gimmicks – x-ray vision, special goggles, psychological disorders, even see-through paint that renders walls invisible.

The variety shtick of the cartoonishly impotent voyeur gave way by 1963-4 to films that more explicitly dramatised sexual subjects, moving into darker genre territory – towards *noir*, action and melodrama, frequently in black and white. As the Production Code became obsolete and state censor board practices unconstitutional, sexploitation film pushed the envelope, aggressively leveraging sexual display within narratives that would justify it. The titles were viscid with innuendo: *Aroused*; *Skin Deep in Love*; *All Women are Bad*; *A Smell of Honey, A Swallow of Brine*; *Smoke and Flesh*; *The Lusting Hours*; *Sin in the City*; *She Should Have Stayed in Bed*. Their heady trailers blared promises of the not-meant-to-be-seen: degradation, vice, ruin. The bodies of their unknown starlets were malleable material for male fantasy, borrowing hooks and tropes from any source handy: 1930s vice films, pinups, men's magazines like *Man's World* and *Gent*, pulp novels, sexological tracts. Most notably, they preoccupied themselves with the ritualised revelation of the denuded female body, and the implications of a female subject – a single, working girl or a straying wife – unglued from reproductive and filial demands. What they weren't: hardcore. Instead, sex filmmakers suggested sexual activity just off screen, with bare buttocks and breasts, gyrating dances, bedroom activity seen above the waist, groping and fondling – though simulated sex became inevitable in the late 1960s. Until the public exhibition of hardcore features in the early 1970s, sexploitation was the name of the game for screening sex in public.

The films were porous vehicles, absorbing the contradictory impulses that gave rise to the sexual revolution. Yet in this largely dystopian mode, sex was never 'free'. Films featured thematised sex work, detailing the travails of nude models, escorts, prostitutes, as well as the office worker or beleaguered job seeker, whose use-value frequently devolved into sexual currency, and treatments of 'deviant' practices,

*The heady trailers for sexploitation films blared promises of the not-meant-to-be-seen: degradation, vice, ruin*

**Peering into the nether-zone: C. Davis Smith's sexploitation film *All My Men* (1966)**

IMAGES COURTESY ELENA GORFINKEL

among them bisexuality, swinging, swapping, psychedelia. The films bear a surprising reflexivity: as if, to figure out how to justify new scenes of looking at exposed flesh, sexploitation producers documented the act of looking itself. Irv Berwick's *Strange Compulsion*, (1964) is one such psychodrama: a young stalker tells his psychiatrist of his obsession with peeking at women unawares, the abject gawker an anxious mirror to the predominantly male film audience. The weirder *Electronic Lover* (Jesse Berger, 1966) gives a deranged peeper, ominously named 'Master', a proto-computer screen and remote video technology; he sends out his minion to broadcast back as he ogles women through windows, perched on fire-escapes.

Sexploitation's narrative formulae ranged from pseudo-documentary and sex-exposé – such as the Greenwich Village-set leering lesbian subculture faux-doc *Chained Girls* (1965) – to melodrama (*Agony of Love*, 1966), and from action films and *policiers* (*Aroused* and *Prostitutes Protective Society*, both 1966) to butch biker dramas (*She Mob*, 1968) and roughie-westerns (*Hot Spur*, 1968). Some sexploiteers also imported and repackaged European films for US distribution, creating synergies between American exploitation and the 'maturity' of European art cinemas. The Swedish-Danish co-production *I, a Woman* (Mac Ahlberg, 1965), released by Metzger's arthouse-minded Audubon Films, gave legitimacy to sexploitation and opened up the market to the 'couples' audience.

Crassness and cheapness may have been sexploitation's defining gambits, but the mode allowed artfulness to flower in unexpected places. The style of filmmaker Joe Sarno, who emulated the aesthetics of Bergman, attests to the impure commingling of art and sex cinemas in this period, and makes a compelling case for what talented filmmakers could do within the limitations of the form. His classic *Sin in the Suburbs* (1963) predates the prurience of Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), with its masked, robed swap parties and suburban *noir*, articulating the mundane ennui of middle-class wives, with a twist of maternal melodrama. The critic Andrew Sarris pronounced Sarno a jewel in the rough, lauding his formal preoccupations as the expression of a "charmingly naive Satanism" and praising his dense *mise en scène*.

Sarno's films prioritised female subjectivity, imbuing them with an affective realism often missing in his fellow directors' work. *The Love Merchant* (1966), which precedes *Indecent Proposal* by more than 25 years, anatomised both a bohemian milieu and a seamy system of sexual trade. Click, a rough sex-broker played by Warhol star Louis Waldon, and his artist girlfriend Bobbi introduce her strait-laced friend Peg to Kendall Harvey III, a rich playboy. The caddish Harvey sniffs out that Peg's husband Roger, an advertising executive, is hard-up for business and offers Peg a devil's bargain. The corrupting sociality of this mercantile erotic milieu is augmented by the contrast between the 'wild' and the 'square'. In her apartment bedecked with stock 'abstract expressionist' canvases, Bobbi remarks that a woman might need "protection" from a man in order to be able to live, work and make art, even if in exchange for a few "favours". Dutiful wife Peg is impelled by more conventional obligations to rescue her husband from financial ruin, and submits to Harvey's proposal.

**Submission accomplished: Manuel Conde's *Nymphs (Anonymous)* (1968)**

Skin flicks in the 1960s provided obvious grist for the feminist critique of the male gaze that would arrive in the 1970s. But they also show that filmic sex is a machine to think with; they are repositories of accounts of female labour, treatises on male anxieties of insufficiency, and vernacular tracts on the relationships between sex and work, looking and consumption. In their preposterous staging of cultural paranoia regarding women's erotic agency, they are also delightfully strange, mordantly funny. In Manuel Conde's *Nymphs (Anonymous)* (1968), members of a proto-feminist secret society of nymphomaniacs subordinates the "feeble" male sex, demanding sexual submission. Male bodies are a resource that is farmed and traded, harvested for nude bartending and sexual servicing. *Nymphs* absurdly contemplates a potential feminist future. An enraged husband, abandoned by his wife, goes rogue, attacking the men his wife has slept with since she has joined the society, until he is captured and made a sex-slave himself.

One of the few female sexploitation directors, Doris Wishman created fascinating films that observed the codes of the genre, if only to undo them. *Indecent Desires* (1968) animated the very inexplicability of women's subjugation to an unseen male desire through a New York voodoo narrative. Zeb, a loner-degenerate, finds a doll and a ring in a trash can. He becomes obsessed with the doll, then sees a woman, Ann (Sharon Kent), who reminds him of it; he proceeds to fondle and maim the doll while stalking and observing Ann. She feels every strange grope of this supernatural rape and, not knowing its cause, thinks she's going mad. Wishman turns the psychic conditions of physical violation into a painfully visible, bewildering process. The story ends grimly, as do many Wishman films, the power of Zeb's projective, phantasmatic hold over Ann complete.

Women who worked behind the camera, such as Wishman and the cinematographer-filmmaker Roberta Findlay, were scarce. Producer Chelly Wilson, who ran Chellee Films and owned the Avon theatres, and Ava Leighton, Radley Metzger's collaborator and co-owner of Audubon Films, are equally significant figures. So were the actresses who became stars in this small field, such as Audrey Campbell and Marsha Jordan. The films trace the gestural and sartorial argot of being and living as a woman in the 1960s – the demands of social performance, the gaits and postures, the fashion and hairstyles that the era's femininity required. It is no wonder that female spectators of sexploitation films, among them the filmmaker Anna Biller (*The Love Witch*), fixate on the material details that furnish their quasi-fictional worlds. Her 2007 *Viva* is a testament to such feminist 'retrospectatorship', restaging the decor and milieu of sexploitation in its late phase.

Lately, the sex film is having a moment. David Simon and George Pelecanos's HBO show *The Deuce* is giving the quality-TV treatment to porno-chic, exploring the development of adult films and the sex industry in early 1970s Times Square. The era's films have also found a savvy audience, aided by new distributors such as the preservation-minded Vinegar Syndrome, Film Movement (both releasing recent restorations of Sarno films on DVD) and the pioneering Something Weird Video, which started it all in 1989, during the VHS era, and deserves credit for building a sexploitation revival among cult fans. Boutique micro-cinemas and arthouse venues run by younger cinephiles have yielded series such as the recent 'Erotic City' at the Quad cinema in New York City, as well as other retrospectives highlighting the tenacious work of sexploitation's makers. In the domain of cinephilia, the shrouded profile of the once lowly skin flick seems suddenly slightly sunnier.

***Lewd Looks: American Sexploitation Cinema in the 1960s*, by Elena Gorfinkel, is published by University of Minnesota Press on 15 October**

# SLOW BURN

**Manufactured landscapes: *Vapor Trail (Clark)*, the first part of John Gianvito's indictment of US foreign policy *For Example, the Philippines***

Patient and unsensational, the documentaries of John Gianvito reveal the indifference to suffering that underlies global power

**By Sukhdev Sandhu**

Nine hours long, John Gianvito's diptych *For Example, the Philippines* – 2010's *Vapor Trail (Clark)* and 2015's *Wake (Subic)* – is likely to be welcomed to the canon of contemporary slow cinema. More importantly, it's a meditation – beady-eyed, expansive, furious – about slow violence. What is slow violence? It's the opposite of those disasters, "falling bodies, burning towers, exploding heads, avalanches, volcanoes and tsunamis", that possess, according to eco-theorist Rob Nixon, "a visceral, eye-catching and page-turning power". Slow violence is "of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world".

*The Forgotten Space* (2010), Allan Sekula and Noel Burch's essay film about containerisation as an engine of modern capitalism, showed that the Philippines supplies more seafarers than any other nation to the international maritime labour force. Gianvito's film starts from the conviction that the liberation struggles in the Philippines at the turn of the 20th century – the islands' handover by Spain to the United States, the brutal suppression of insurgency by American troops – are critical episodes that not only foreshadowed but enabled a century of US expansion. What could have been a self-contained project about the Philippines becomes an exploration of contemporary bio-power, the architectonics of globalisation, the often ugly horizon of possibilities that confronts the world's poorest peoples.

The Philippines of *For Example* is a manufactured landscape. It was built from American imperialism, the enduring presence of military bases, and noxious environmental pollution. Locals who worked at or near the bases were exposed to heavy metals, asbestos and carcinogenic toxins. Stretches of the films document the cancers, deformities and breathing problems they suffered. One scene, recalling the cemetery close-ups in Gianvito's *Profit Motive and the Whispering Wind* (2007), features a seemingly endless series of headstones of infants and young children. Another, at once uneventful and terrible, focuses on a disabled boy being sat up, fed and washed by his mother; his body – like much of the land surrounding Clark Air Base and the Subic Bay naval base – has been ruined by foreign greed.

Gianvito also follows organisers from the Alliance for Bases Clean-Up as they travel to affected communities, log the damage done, campaign for redress. They look so tired. They can't stop. Over the years they've been harassed by the military. International donors sometimes seem more interested in photo opportunities than sustained engagement with locals. One man, the ill father of an ill child, pulls out a bag of water-damaged photos of him in Saudi Arabia, where he used to make overalls and drive a forklift truck. He was homesick then; now his home is making him sick.

There are lingering shots of deceptively verdant landscapes. Sometimes the screen is black, sometimes there is silence, and sometimes traditional songs of rebellion and resistance (one performed by director Lav Diaz) are heard. Archival photographs of the Philippine-American War are shown; one, taken at the Battle of Bud Bagsak in 1913, led the Pan-African American sociologist W.E.B. Dubois to declare: "It is the most illuminating thing I have ever seen. I want to have it framed to impress upon students what wars of conquest really mean."

*Why is Gianvito willing to risk limiting the audience for this important matrix of issues by making such an extended work?*

You may wonder why Gianvito is willing to risk limiting the audience for this important matrix of issues by making such an extended work. It's intriguing that *Vapor Trail* features sequences narrated by Travis Wilkerson, the American director whose *An Injury to One* (2002) was a strikingly urgent and (merely) 50-minute-long piece of avant-propaganda confronting the political and environmental legacies of the Anaconda Mining Company Butte, Montana, during World War I.

But it's precisely the speed and seamlessness with which decades of complex Filipino politics are often narrated that troubles historian Reynaldo Ileto. He has asked: "In the context of an emancipatory history of the 20th century, a history of forward movement from what was pictured as Spanish medievalism toward a modern nation-state via an enlightened US colonial regime, is it any surprise that the Philippine-American War became somewhat of a non-event, a glitch in an otherwise smooth progression?" Gianvito's activists are in it for the long haul. They argue that the contamination of the public imagination – by advertising and foreign media – is something that might take decades to clean up.

*For Example* doesn't think of itself as a call to arms, or its viewers as converts to a cause. In spite of its length it doesn't feel epic. What it does, in patient and caustic fashion, is contribute to counter-memory, acting as a plaque for the peoples and places disappeared in the name of American values, to create a zone of contemplation. In a 2006 diplomatic cable published by WikiLeaks, the US embassy in Manila estimated that the Philippines had an untapped mineral wealth of almost $1 trillion. Gianvito's diptych will be as important in 20 years as it is now.

**i** ***Profit Motive and the Whispering Wind* screens at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, on 26 October, and *For Example, the Philippines* screens at Close-Up, London on 4-5 November**

PRIMAL SCREEN

# LIVING THE HIGH LIFE

Betty Balfour, whose cheerful energy helped her survive the transition to talkies, was the star at a Leicester banquet of silent films

**By Pamela Hutchinson**

The 19th British Silent Film Festival, held in Leicester in September, dwelt on the transition between 'movies' and 'talkies', as the UK industry scrambled to adjust to new technology, and new expectations from across the Atlantic. Inevitably, there was an opportunity to linger on what was lost in the leap, as the fluid camerawork and expressive performances that characterised the late silent period, were replaced by static camera setups, composed around concealed microphones and the unexpectedly clipped delivery of previously passionate-seeming actors. In truth, though, many of British cinema's best assets survived the turbulence intact. Alfred Hitchcock was not the only British director of silents to shoot accomplished sound pictures: on the evidence of this festival, he was joined by Walter Summers, Sinclair Hill and Maurice Elvey for starters. Some of Britain's best-loved stars also thrived in the new medium – but none more so than the irrepressible Betty Balfour, represented at Leicester by three films, illustrating different aspects of her talent and phases of her career.

There's a certain murkiness around Balfour's origins. She was born in 1902 or 1903, in County Durham or London: no matter. Once she had been spotted on stage by producer/director George Pearson, Balfour was recreated by the studio publicity department as "a smartly-attired, highly-polished little West-Ender", a genteel young lady from Hampstead, whose aristocratic connections had supported her rise to stardom. Petite, with a cloud of tight blonde curls and a sugary smile, Balfour posed gracefully in glitzy gowns, but always radiated warmth. Somewhat perversely, her breakthrough role was as a 'slavey' comic, playing the cockney flower-seller who gave her name to *Squibs* (1921). Balfour starred in several films as this adventurous scamp, and almost all of her best roles involved her transforming from rags to riches or vice-versa, with the dazzling spectacle of Balfour's chiffon and sequins glamour softened by her essentially down-to-earth charisma. She made films in continental Europe, but never Hollywood, and starred in one of Hitchcock's silents, *Champagne* (1928), though it wasn't her best work. In the 1930s Balfour made a few musicals, but her career soon dried up, and although she lived until 1978 her later years were marred by drink and a suicide attempt in 1952.

In *Paradise* (1928), at the height of her fame, Balfour played Kitty, a vicar's daughter, depressed by the dreariness of London life, who wins £500 in a crossword contest. Both her father and her doctor boyfriend have ideas about how she should spend her windfall, but Kitty cannot be deterred from a jaunt to the Riviera and a suite in a ritzy hotel. Once there, dressed up to the nines and nibbling on caviar and toast in the ballroom, she falls prey to Alexander D'Arcy's smooth Russian gigolo, who seems to confuse sponging off elderly tourists in the Med with a righteous crusade on behalf of his fellow tsarist exiles, all working as hotel servants. The film falters, not least in its crushingly regressive ending, when the good doctor tracks Kitty down and engages in a criminal subterfuge to force her to return home and submit to marriage. However, Balfour carries the day, channelling Gloria Swanson as she is buffeted and squashed during her tube commute (shades of Swanson's turn in Allan Dwan's 1924 *Manhandled*), and also when she runs a luxurious bath in her hotel suite. Swanson, directed by Cecil B. DeMille in *Male and Female* (1919), say, would play that sort of business for sophisticated sexiness. Balfour being Balfour, she potters around the boudoir in her sheepskin slippers, before plopping into the tub with a splash.

In *Raise the Roof* (1930), a slight but charming musical directed by Walter Summers, she is minxier still, if only because as a 'theatrical type' her character is allowed a little more worldly wisdom. When she discovers that her ex-boyfriend is trying to sabotage her revue, Maisie (Balfour) delivers a rousing pep talk to the troupe.

*Where Gloria Swanson would play for sophisticated sexiness, Balfour potters around the boudoir in her sheepskin slippers*

Not only will the show go on, but they'll rip up the old book and concoct something far more exciting. Maisie has opined earlier in the film that the audience demands "laughter and legs – mostly legs"; happily, the principal catastrophe striking the company is a lost wardrobe trunk. The film therefore climaxes with a series of saucy numbers in which Balfour and the Plaza Tiller Girls perform not-quite-naked behind twirling parasols or a 'Censored' banner, or in hastily assembled newsprint costumes, singing "the only male I'm hugging is the Special Edition".

It was in 1927's *A Sister of Six* that Balfour shone the brightest, though, as Mizzi, a scrappy Hungarian schoolgirl who flirts with a handsome duke on a train. This Swedish-German co-production was burdened with multiple plot twists but buoyed along by eccentric humour and Balfour's deft, excitable comic turn. She even spends a prolonged section of the film in remarkably effective drag, seducing a model on the flimsy pretext of purloining a ballgown. The film, directed by an uncredited Carl Hoffmann (cinematographer for many of Fritz Lang's early films), is packed with visual gags, and Balfour fizzes opposite her German leading man, Willy Fritsch. To see Mizzi putting on a so-called sophisticated act by puffing on an unaccustomed cigar while claiming she prefers to snort cocaine is to get right to the essence of Balfour appeal – an urchin taking a holiday in the high life.

**The look of silents: Betty Balfour**

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# FANTASTIC VOYAGE

With their echoes of expressionism and traditional Indonesian forms, Garin Nugroho's enigmatic films take cinema back to its beginnings

**By Tony Rayns**

Indonesia isn't short of talented and innovative filmmakers, but Garin Nugroho would be exceptional in any context. The only one of his films released in the UK is *Opera Java* (2006), made for Peter Sellars's Mozart 250th-anniversary festival 'New Crowned Hope' in Vienna, so he's not too well-known here. For latecomers, the skinny in brief: he grew up in an arts-oriented, liberal (Sufi-influenced) Muslim family in Yogyakarta, studied both film and law in Jakarta, and began making feature films in 1991 – a time when Indonesian cinema was at a low ebb. He's a child of Suharto's 'New Order', but only in the sense that the state's authoritarian and censorious ideology gave him something to react against. Much of his work (some 15 features to date, plus loads of documentaries and shorts) is celebratory in character, and what he celebrates is Indonesia's diverse cultures, languages and histories. (Some of the histories, of course, are tragic, and not only because of the Dutch colonial period and its aftermath.) Just as he stood against the former government's attempt to impose uniformity on Indonesia's thousands of islands, so he now stands against the 'religious' fundamentalism that Wahhabi Muslims would like to impose on the country with back-up from Saudi-financed madrasas.

Garin's two latest features are twin attempts to take cinema back to its origins. *A Woman from Java* (*Nyai*, 2016) is mounted as if it were a stage play and filmed in a single 85-minute take. The camera is sometimes static, observing a colonial-era household as if from imaginary theatre stalls, but more often in motion, tracking back and forth to follow action or moving in for closer views. The film is set in 1927 and centres on the Indonesian wife of a dying Dutch plantation owner; the entire piece is a cipher for the birth-pangs of a post-colonial Indonesia. And *Satan Java* (*Setan Jawa*, 2016), which was screened/performed in London and Glasgow in September, is a neo-silent expressionist movie designed to be shown with a gamelan-ensemble accompaniment written by the great Rahayu Supanggah, who also scored *Opera Java*. At some performances Rahayu's music is augmented with contributions from local musicians, but it was just the gamelan players in London. They – and the film – were given a standing ovation.

*Satan Java* is divided into seven chapters but has no dialogue intertitles. The story is told and meanings are expressed entirely through image design, film language, movement and facial expressions and masks: there are visual echoes of the Indonesian shadow-play puppet theatre *wayang kulit*, as well as of Garin's memories of movies by Murnau and Lang. The story itself is Garin's free interpretation of a Javanese folk tale: poor villager Setio falls for Asih, daughter of the local ruling family, and she for him. But the family cruelly rejects Setio's overtures (Asih's mother stabs his hand with a hairpin) and Setio turns to Satan for help. Satan, crushed by the colonial powers, subsists as a cunning spirit. He makes Setio rich, so that he and Asih can marry, but Setio has to promise that he will become a pillar in Satan's spirit-house on his death. When Asih discovers this pact, she tries to negotiate her husband's freedom but finally has no choice but to surrender herself to Satan. The final chapter-title recognises her self-sacrifice as "the human way".

**Ride with the devil: *Satan Java* (2016), Garin's Indonesian neo-silent expressionist movie**

*Garin is a child of Suharto's 'New Order', in the sense that the state's censorious ideology gave him something to react against*

**Folk signals: *Satan Java***

Garin traces his interest in Javanese mysticism back to the household in which he grew up, at once a publishing house, a dance academy and a centre for a local hybrid religion with animist and Sufi elements. His penchant for magic realism was clear in earlier films like *A Poet* (2001; on the 60s massacres of alleged communists in western Indonesia, long before the supposedly ground-breaking *The Act of Killing*) and *Bird Man Tale* (2002; on the Papuan struggle for self-government), but his sense of 'magic' is bound up with the way he foregrounds his characters' drives for social, psychological and, above all, sexual freedoms. *Opera Java* was ultimately about male desire, and its narrative turning-point was set in a diaphanous tent whose shape and colour suggested the human vagina. *Satan Java*, by contrast, centres on female desire and makes much of the phallic connotations of the pillar that Setio is destined to turn into.

Garin's films exalt the imagination, but always in concrete, physical terms. Maybe it's because he sees the mind and body as aspects of each other that he's drawn to the dramatic possibilities of dance. (Abigail Asmara, who plays Asih, once worked as a pole dancer and uses her suppleness and quasi-acrobatic skills to great effect in the film.) Much of *Satan Java*, though, deliberately resists analysis. Its images are consistently stunning, its storyline is both neorealist and magical, and its tone is oneiric. Sure beats most of what passes for 'fantasy cinema' these days.

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# CRIMES OF THE

*'Arrival' director Denis Villeneuve discusses the daunting responsibility of taking on 'Blade Runner 2049', the sequel to Ridley Scott's classic sci-fi noir, and why the prospect made him afraid of looking like a vandal with paint in a church*

**By James Mottram**

**TO LIVE AND DIE IN LA**
**In *Blade Runner 2049*, Ryan Gosling plays Officer K, a detective tasked with hunting illegal bio-engineered androids, or 'replicants' – whose investigations lead him to the original film's Rick Deckard, played by Harrison Ford**

**It would be almost impossible** to list the ways in which Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) has impacted science fiction filmmaking. Adapted from Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), it was certainly a touchstone for the French-Canadian director Denis Villeneuve. "I saw this movie maybe 50 times," he says. "It's definitely the movie I saw the most in my life." Now he's been given the daunting mission of delivering the sequel, *Blade Runner 2049*.

His appointment feels well earned after a quartet of critically admired English-language films – *Prisoners* (2013), *Enemy* (2013), *Sicario* (2015) and *Arrival* (2016) – have positioned him as one of Hollywood's most 'visionary' directors. That tag may be overused in contemporary cinema, but Villeneuve has more than proved his capabilities in that arena – not least with *Arrival*, a first-contact sci-fi story that owes a large debt to Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977).

When we meet in London, Villeneuve is as relaxed as he's been for months. Last night he was out for dinner with Scott, who has seen Villeneuve's finished film and has given him the seal of approval. "Before, I was always apprehensive: will he love my film or not?"

FUTURE

It's an understandable anxiety, given just how involved Scott has been with the production, writing the script with Hampton Fancher – who co-wrote the first *Blade Runner* – and Michael Green.

While Scott may have seen the finished film, the press haven't. At the time of writing, just two-and-a-half weeks before release, there have been no screenings, with distributor Sony Pictures fearful of spoilers leaking. Set 30 years after its predecessor, what is known is that Ryan Gosling plays Officer K, a young 'blade runner' – the detectives who hunt down the illegal bio-engineered androids, or 'replicants' – whose investigations lead him to the original's Rick Deckard (played by Harrison Ford).

**James Mottram: You were 14 when *Blade Runner* came out. What impact did it have on you?**

**Denis Villeneuve:** It was something I was deeply looking for: someone who would take sci-fi seriously. In literature, it's a serious genre: there was Isaac Asimov, Frank Herbert, Arthur C. Clarke. Those artists are taking sci-fi seriously. But in movies, sci-fi was very much approached as a B-movie genre – with the exception of Stanley Kubrick's *2001* [*A Space Odyssey*, 1968]. They were always clumsy or badly done. It's very rare that a strong artist will go on with sci-fi and make a serious piece of art. For me, *Blade Runner* is one of those rare gems in film history where a true artist decided to make a real sci-fi movie.

**JM: Unlike *Alien*, a franchise begun by Scott that has seen numerous sequels and spin-offs, this is the first film to follow *Blade Runner*. Was that a concern for you?**

**DV:** Yes. I was afraid of looking like a vandal with paint in a church! I will say there was a huge freedom coming from the fact that I was the first one [to make a sequel]. I remember a conversation I had with Ryan Gosling right at the start, where we both agreed that our chances of success were very small, that what we were trying to do was insane. Once we made peace with that, it gave us a lot of freedom. We said, "We're going to do a pure artistic gesture." Like a painter. We will give everything and try to do our best, and after that we know that people will judge us and condemn us, and will compare us to a masterpiece – no matter how good the movie is.

**JM: Beyond his input at script stage, what involvement did Ridley Scott have?**

**DV:** He was at the birth of the project: the main ideas, the main characters, the art of the film, is from him. From him and Hampton Fancher. Then Michael Green came on board. So Ridley was there a lot, from an influence point of view. It's his screenplay. Then I made the movie my own. Ridley gave me total freedom. Right at the start when I met him, when he gave me his blessing to do the movie, we had a long meeting together and he basically gave me the genesis of the first movie, his influences, how it was done, what were the challenges, why he took some aesthetic decisions. Then he said, "And this one is yours. You do what you want. It's your responsibility. If you need me, I will be there." And it's true. When I had a question about casting, or about a technical thing, he very quickly answered me and I was very grateful for that. He came on set for a few hours once for publicity reasons and for curiosity, to see the sets, but he gave me total freedom. I would not have been able to work with him behind me. You cannot work with the master; it would be unbearable... but he was very generous with me. The man allowed me to play in his dreams.

*I remember a conversation with Ryan Gosling, where we agreed our chances of success were small, that what we were trying to do was insane. Once we made peace with that, it gave us a lot of freedom*

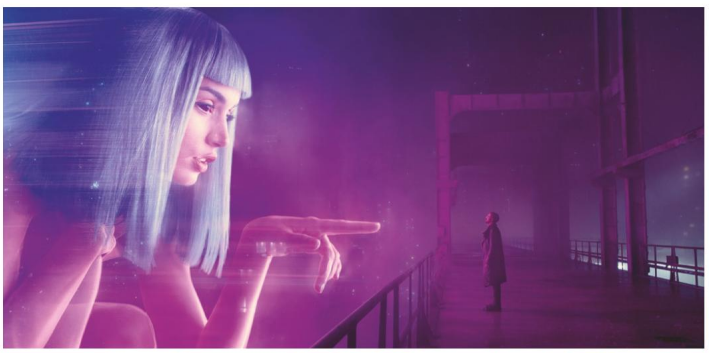
**JM: You worked with cinematographer Roger Deakins on *Prisoners* and *Sicario*. How was your collaboration with him here?**

**DV:** Roger is a painter and also a very strong storyteller. He was my closest and strongest collaborator. Roger was part of this project since day zero. One of the most important moments in the filmmaking process for me is the dream moment, when you find images inside you that will fuel the movie. Usually I do it alone; but for this movie I said, "Listen, I'm shooting in 18 months. I need help." And I brought in Roger right from the start. As I was editing *Arrival*, Roger came to Montreal and we spent several weeks together there drawing the movie.

He was there full-time, with storyboard artists. We spent hours and hours... and basically in that period, we rewrote and designed the movie. When you storyboard, you change things dramatically. All the cinematic decisions are made there. We designed most of the movie – the buildings, the vehicles, and we made a lot of decisions about the laws of the universe that we were going to use. We did a lot of visual research. For me, it was one of the most exciting periods. It was paradise to be with Roger alone, and the movie was born there.

**JM: How did you set out to design the film? The images seen so far – such as the deserts of Las Vegas – are different to the original *Blade Runner*, and yet feel completely of that world.**

**DV:** I'm so happy you're saying this because it was very tricky. The thing is, I was very secure when we were in the same neighbourhood as Deckard. When we were evolving the *film noir* aesthetic, when we were in the streets of LA, in the darkness, in the smog... it was a world that was exciting and yet I felt secure. I knew I was in the *Blade Runner* universe. When we stepped out of that neighbourhood, when we were trying to go more on the outskirts of Los Angeles and trying to explore new territories, I felt a huge responsibility and it was frightening for me to try as much as possible to stay in the dystopian, urban landscape and create something that will still be a part of the *Blade Runner* world. We stretched it. Sometimes, I felt we were in a dangerous zone; I took several



**BACK TO THE FUTURE (Clockwise from top left) Ryan Gosling as Officer K; Jared Leto as Niander Wallace; Gosling, with Ana de Armas as Joi; Gosling with Harrison Ford as Deckard – in *Blade Runner 2049* by Denis Villeneuve (opposite)**

decisions in order to bring it back as close as possible to our world.

**JM: In *Blade Runner*, the backdrops showed major brands like the now virtually defunct Atari. And yet you have continued using this in the design of the cityscapes. What was your thinking?**

**DV:** I think Atari almost disappeared at one point; it went bankrupt and then it came back recently. There was something in the first movie that was quite powerful... you were seeing real companies, real brands, and that made a link with our reality and it made the movie feel real. The movie is filled with names and brands everywhere and we did the same, but I insisted that we use mostly companies that are part of the first movie, and most of them are dead right now – like Pan Am. Atari was important to me because it was a company that was linked with that era, that period of time, and it's part of the aesthetic of the first movie. A lot of graphic design is inspired by Atari video games; the spirit of the 80s is very present in the film.

**JM: *Blade Runner* is sometimes said to be the last great special-effects film before the arrival of CGI. What was your approach for the sequel?**

**DV:** There are three movies where the VFX are astonishing: *2001*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Blade Runner* – all with effects by Douglas Trumbull. He is the master – a strong genius. Those special effects have never been [bettered]. Honestly, Roger Deakins and I – our goal as we were doing our movie, with all the CGI and all the technology, was to try to honour the strength of the first movie. We were saying to ourselves that 35 years on we are struggling to achieve just the beginning of the quality of what they've done. Even today it's still difficult to achieve that.

**JM: Did you try to do a lot in camera?**

**DV:** Yes, but not what they did. We constructed all the giant sets, we controlled all the atmospheres, so there will just be a bit of CGI extension in the back. We did models for the cities, like they did. But we used digital, we had the power of computers to help us, and obviously it's much easier today than what they had to do – which was pure genius.

**JM: Does *Blade Runner 2049* continue pursuing themes of the world on the verge of environmental collapse?**

**DV:** I would say that it's in the background: the sub-story. Like in the first one, the story is set in a world where the environment and eco-system has collapsed, where there was a major change in the climate and the earth is slowly dying. Like in the novel, like in the first movie, it's just getting worse. People are trying to get out of there as much as possible.

**JM: Ridley Scott says *Blade Runner* was all about paranoia. Again, are you focusing on that?**

**DV:** That inner paranoia, that inner doubt, that existential paranoia, is still in the movie. The new movie has a totally different story with very similar themes.

**JM: You obviously can't reveal much. How do you feel about the secrecy surrounding *Blade Runner 2049*?**

**DV:** I always loved secrecy around movies. I loved that people knew as little as possible. They will go into the cinema and discover the movie. But today with the internet, people want so much to know... I don't understand really why – apart from being excited. It diminishes your pleasure as a viewer.

The thing is, this time, the level of secrecy, I've never experienced that. At the beginning we were not allowed to say to our families where we were shooting. It started with the screenplays in the safe. Everything was so secret. Even for my film crew, a lot of people didn't read the screenplay. Some people didn't know what we were doing! It was really very, very secret. And I liked the idea because it will be more interesting for the audience. But it's a bit painful for me to do press with journalists who haven't seen the movie. I wish you had seen it because it would be much easier... I like to have a conversation about filmmaking. Now I feel like a car seller!

***Blade Runner 2049* is out now in UK cinemas and will be reviewed in our next issue**

# THE AIR-CONDITIONED NIGHTMARE

*The bland, sinister corporate locations used by Alan J. Pakula in his era-defining 'paranoia trilogy' – 'Klute', 'The Parallax View' and 'All the President's Men' – perfectly capture the threats of everyday surveillance and political conspiracy in the 1970s*

**By Adam Scovell**

**A man is following someone up an escalator.** The space around them gleams with inhuman malevolence, as if it was designed for violence and conspiracy. Soon one of the men will be dead, yet somehow this fails to surprise us, for the building they are in is as cold and uncaring as the powers that built it. This scene is from the second entry in Alan J. Pakula's powerful 'paranoia trilogy', *The Parallax View* (1974), a film that builds suspense by deliberately playing on the banal malice of such spaces. Alongside *Klute* (1971) and *All the President's Men* (1976), Pakula's film captures the beginnings of an era in which we're still living: the age of what can be called air-con spaces. These are the empty corporate zones that have become symbols of political underhandedness, unnerving surveillance and a very secretive violence. Whether empty inner-city hotels, conference spaces filled with lonely escalators, vacant car parks or shopping malls after hours, these American spaces were the sites of the conspiracy and corruption that tainted the genuine political reality of the early 1970s.

All three films deliberately play on the increased tension within the country in this era. There is menace in the ordinary here, something malignant that has been brewing since the earliest provocations of the Cold War and accelerated by the assassinations that scarred American politics in the 1960s. These are the traumas in Pakula's trilogy, a cathartic expression of concern over the political machinations deployed by US governments and organisations in this period. Yet it seems as though the very architecture itself came to define such politics, setting the blueprint for our contemporary spatial and political maladies.

Following his 1969 feature debut, *The Sterile Cuckoo*, Pakula began to express such concerns in *Klute*, an inner-city fable concerning a private detective (Donald Sutherland) and his search for a missing executive, who is connected to call-girl Bree Daniels (Jane Fonda) through several letters. Though the air-con spaces of this film are limited, they are essential in defining the contrasting worlds within the drama. The executive who ordered the investigation, Cable (Charles Cioffi), conducts a campaign of terror against the call-girl in order to hide his role in the disappearance and, crucially, this is shown to be overseen from his high-level boardroom: low-light, misty views, morally barren. The building is, in fact, 26 Church Street in Lower Manhattan and Pakula shot at the location while a much larger set of air-con spaces was

REX FEATURES (2)

being constructed adjacent to it, seen outside the executive's windows in this scene. Learning that these cranes were building the World Trade Centre only adds to the unnerving poignancy of Pakula's film.

In one particularly effective moment, Cable is seen in the space listening to a revealing tape. The scene alerts the viewer to the fact that Bree's paranoia about being secretly observed is in fact well justified. Her fears are far from delusional but part of the increasingly common reality of the Watergate era, a surveillance culture which haunts all three films. The camera observes the shady boardroom as Cable stands up; it then suggests he is looking down on the world below, before cutting to Bree's homely apartment, which significantly is situated much lower down. This is the contrast – the suspicious individuals who inhabit these spaces have both a physical and symbolic ability to observe all below them. As the cranes continue to build the Twin Towers over the road, Pakula captures the growing trend for such spaces, which are usually presented devoid of people, or at least large enough to disperse the people within them.

Pakula captures the ultimate air-con space in *The Parallax View*, as the film's culminating act of violence, one which defines the whole narrative, takes place in a conference centre. A journalist, Frady (Warren Beatty), has suspicions about the official explanation over a political candidate's assassination in the Seattle Space Needle. He follows a trail of shady characters who lead ultimately to the so-called Parallax Organisation and to a further conspiracy. Another assassination is due to take place in the conference centre, where a dress rehearsal is underway for a senator's political rally. The centre is a vast and intimidating space where men are half-seen, staring from behind curtains or from the shadows of the rafters. Even the outside of the building has a reflective, thoroughly alien quality. Pakula very deliberately frames the beginning of this final sequence from these dead exteriors. It's actually a composite of two real buildings: the Central Civil West Courthouse and the Los Angeles Convention Centre – in this era Pakula was clearly spoilt for choice for potential locations.

Inside the space, the musical score dies down, making the most of the strange ambience of such places: the hum of lights, the swirl of fans, the breeze of the air-con, the drone of a vacuum cleaner somewhere deep inside the labyrinth. This is interrupted by the marching band's practice for the evening rally in the main hall, while, behind the fanfare, men in suits are gathering in the corners, haunting the corridors with an air of officialdom. They are organised, the space is theirs. When Pakula puts characters into these spaces, something curious happens. While Frady and the man he is following are on the escalator, their presence is unsettling, even incongruous. These spaces may possess all the usual trappings of human life but showing the facilities with only a small number of people highlights the absurdity in their scale. The rows and rows of empty tables prepared for the rally seem to underline the ultimate hollowness of the event, the senator's voice occulted to a tape machine that rolls on even after the assassin's bullets have ripped through his diaphragm. It is this vast scale that is ultimately the undoing of Frady, who is left scurrying in the building's rafters and then shot after being framed for the assassination, a tiny figure trapped by an immense conspiracy.

The two films lead naturally to *All the President's Men*, with its dramatic rendering of the conspiracy of Richard Nixon's Watergate scandal. Interestingly, however, something has changed. The fight-back against the unseen powers threatening those who possess the information needed to bring the truth out into the open, also takes place within an air-con space: the office of the *Washington Post* reporters Carl Bernstein (Dustin Hoffman) and Bob Woodward (Robert Redford). But, given how important the war of information has become in this era, this shift is fitting. Much of the essential intelligence provided to the duo comes from secretive meetings conducted in an empty underground car park, lit with icy blue strip-lights that render the anonymous source a shadow. What is essential about Pakula's use of this space is the way it helps to build tension, finding the thrilling in what is essentially mundane. Far from making these meetings safer, their quietude racks up the tension, making every sound and every element potentially malevolent.

The film opens with a perfect embodiment of the air-con space, the Democratic headquarters in the Watergate building during the break-in, showing the moment when the trail of conspiracy first becomes evident. The office feels eerie as the five burglars make their way along the carpeted corridors, furnished with everyday corporate fittings and objects. The mundanity of such spaces is essential; their blandness seems harmless but is often anything but. The ubiquitous surveillance potential identified in these films merges fiction and reality, capturing the spirit of the age. In the same year *The Parallax View* was released, Francis Ford Coppola defined this feeling of being permanently observed in *The Conversation* (1974), a film full of windows hiding telescopes and audio-surveillance equipment. The architecture of this period seems purpose-built for surveillance, places that expose anyone ignorant of the reality of covert activities. Even Scorpio (Andy Robinson), the manic killer from Don Siegel's *Dirty Harry* (1971), finds potential in the anonymity and surveillance opportunities of

**THEY ARE OUT TO GET YOU Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford in Alan J. Pakula's *All the President's Men* (1976, opposite), Jane Fonda in *Klute* (1971, top), and Warren Beatty and Anthony Zerbe in *The Parallax View* (1974, above)**

## KLUTE

Charles Cioffi's villain appears to be omniscient as he sits in his office, as if he has a god-like ability to observe Jane Fonda's call-girl in her flat far below

## THE PARALLAX VIEW

The vast conference centre at the film's close suggests a near inhuman scale, with shadowy figures who frame Warren Beatty's journalist in an immense conspiracy

## ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN

The film opens in the air-conditioned corridors of the Democratic headquarters in the Watergate building, as the five burglers are disturbed mid break-in

*Such spaces breed paranoia and hidden malevolence – the assassination of a politician, the surveillance of a call-girl or a politically unscrupulous break-in*

these buildings, making his first killing from one of their rooftops. They favour psychopaths and madmen, official or otherwise.

Modernity is now defined by these air-con spaces, and the events that happen within them become increasingly surreal. They are spaces in which Christopher Walken can literally fly through the air, as in Spike Jonze's video for Fatboy Slim's 'Weapon of Choice' (2001); the lobby of the L.A. Hotel vacant, allowing such a strange scenario to seem almost natural. Such spaces have become the norm, even in Europe, where designs have been imported from America. J.G. Ballard brilliantly examined this transition, in his last period of writing around the turn of the millennium. Though his earlier fiction seemed to be defined by such spaces literally degrading the morality of their many occupants *à la Crash* (1973) and *High-Rise* (1975), his later novels bask in the violent potential of the newly gleaming corporate spaces. This comes to a head in his novel *Super-Cannes* (2000), in which the conference centre aesthetic has created such boredom for their middle-class occupants that they have reverted to extreme, racial violence as a form of release. In novels such as *Cocaine Nights* (1996) and *Kingdom Come* (2006), air-con spaces become surreal backdrops for middle-class terrorism and consumer fascism. Even the BFI Southbank becomes an air-con space for Ballard in *Millennium People* (2003), the NFT 3 cinema now a place of unfolding psychological terrorism with its thin carpets and empty sofas.

Ballard was building on Pakula's vision of such paranoid spaces – and as London is increasingly turned into one vast air-con space taken over by empty luxury flats, huge shopping centres and conference centres, Pakula's trilogy appears more and more prophetic in its warning of the dangers of the corporatisation of space. This danger was also hinted at in Mike Leigh's *Naked* (1993), when Johnny (David Thewlis) talks his way into an empty corporate high-rise and ventures through its corridors with the night-watchman Brian (Peter Wight). Johnny seems even more manic in this space than in the rest of film, reverting to conspiracy and paranoia as he predicts the end of the world at the birth of the new millennium. His delusions almost ring true – not because of any sense of compelling argument but because he is stating them in the empty air-con space of the tower block: the apocalyptic and the banal here sit incredibly comfortably together.

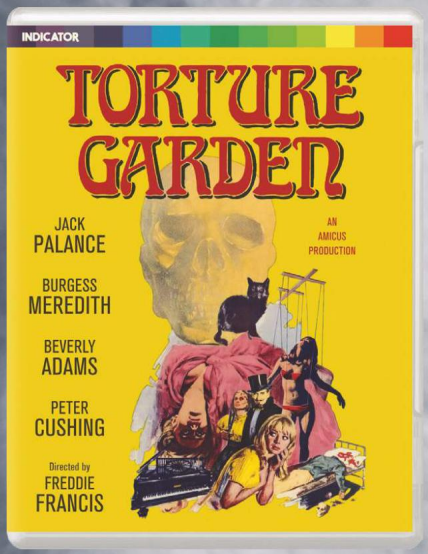
Such spaces breed paranoia and hidden malevolence – the assassination of a politician, the surveillance of a call-girl or a politically unscrupulous break-in – making these films both unnerving and thrilling. Arguably, it is because these spaces still dominate our modern world that the trilogy has aged so well. We are undoubtedly living in their shadow, now simply ghosts on closed circuit TV, forever observed by persons unknown.

**Pakula's 'paranoia trilogy' plays at BFI Southbank, London, in October and November as part of the 'Who Can You Trust?' season of thrillers. A BFI Compendium book to accompany the season, with essays by Lee Child, Jake Arnott, Sarah Weinman and others, is available from the BFI Shop, Amazon and book shops, priced £18.99**

# INDICATOR presents

*October 2017*

**HAMMER VOLUME ONE: FEAR WARNING! – *Maniac / The Gorgon / The Curse of the Mummy's Tomb / Fanatic* (aka *Die! Die! My Darling!*)** Four classics from Hammer, each presented on Blu-ray for the very first time in the UK. Whether it's a madman brandishing a welding torch, a mythical monster whose looks can kill, an ancient royal with diabolical powers, or a mad woman wielding a pair of scissors, this set has something to unease everybody. Containing a wealth of new and exclusive extra features – including title-specific documentaries, cast and crew interviews, expert appreciations, introductions and more – this stunning Blu-ray-only Limited Edition box set is published in a horribly limited, numbered edition of 6,000 units. **Available 30 October 2017**




## TORTURE GARDEN
## (Freddie Francis, 1967)

UK Blu-ray premiere with new and exclusive extra features. From Hammer-rival Amicus Productions comes this horror anthology penned by Robert Bloch (author of *Psycho*) and directed by the great British cinematographer Freddie Francis. Peter Cushing stars alongside Jack Palance and Burgess Meredith in an omnibus of chilling and gruesome stories, inspired by E.C. Comics' *Tales from the Crypt* comic-book series of the 1950s. **Available 30 October 2017**

## FRAGMENT OF FEAR
## (Richard C. Sarafian, 1970)

UK Blu-ray premiere with new and exclusive extra features. Based on the novel *A Fragment of Fear* by former M15 spy John Bingham, 7th Baron Clanmorris, this stylish cine-trip from *Vanishing Point* director Richard C. Sarafian features David Hemmings and Gayle Hunnicutt (then real-life husband and wife) falling into a waking nightmare of murder, mystery and paranoia. **Available 30 October 2017**

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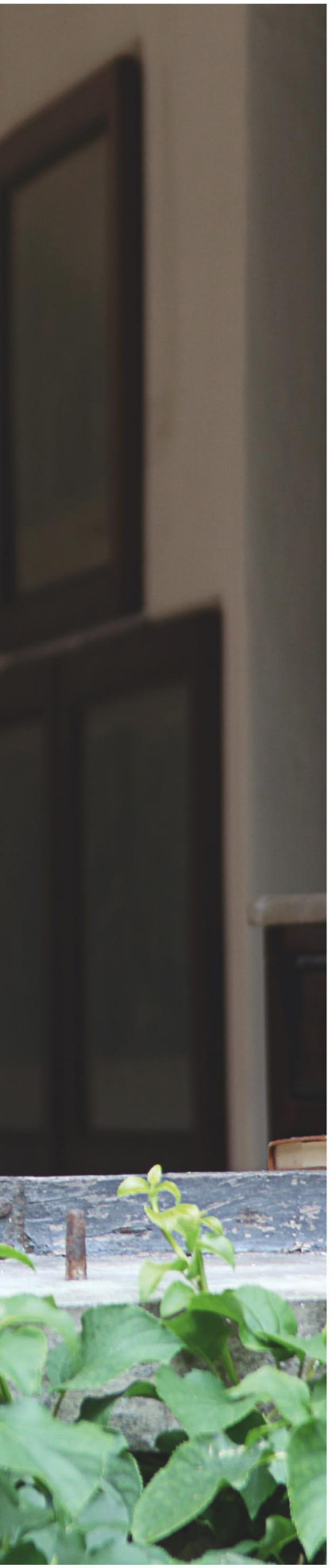
**A TEENAGER IN LOVE** Timothée Chalamet plays Elio, a young Italian who falls in love with a visiting American academic during his summer vacation, in Luca Guadagnino's *Call Me by Your Name*



# MY SUMMER OF LOVE

*Luca Guadagnino's exquisite coming-of-age love story 'Call Me by Your Name' explores a passionate summer affair between two young men. Here the director explains why the film is a homage to the cinema he loves and discusses his debt to his great idol Bernardo Bertolucci*

**By Pamela Hutchinson**

**Over the course of a sultry summer** in northern Italy, during the early 1980s, Luca Guadagnino's latest film inhabits an intense, slow-burning love affair between two young men. *Call Me by Your Name* is based on André Aciman's much-loved 2007 novel of the same title, a first-person study of youthful desire and fierce physical passion in an intellectual milieu.

*Call Me by Your Name* is every bit as sexy, gorgeous and sharply observed as Guadagnino's most recent work, *A Bigger Splash* (2015), in which Tilda Swinton played a mute rock star torn between her garrulous ex Ralph Fiennes, and her troubled soulmate Matthias Schoenaerts, closely watched by Dakota Johnson's teenage sexpot. It has a hint of the devastating passion of Swinton's forbidden love affair with her son's business partner in *I Am Love* (2009) too, and also recalls Guadagnino's first feature, the coming-of-age sexual memoir *Melissa P.* (2005). *Call Me by Your Name* is more successful than all those films, though, with performances of vivid emotional sincerity choreographed into a stalking game of love and lust. The film has already been highly praised by critics and embraced by younger audiences online, following its debut at Sundance this year.

Timothée Chalamet, best known for turns in *Homeland* (2011-) and *Interstellar* (2014) but with a slate of independent films behind him – including a role in Greta Gerwig's forthcoming *Lady Bird* – is excellent as the teenage Elio, whose early bravado is shattered and then rebuilt when he falls in love during his summer holiday. The object of his affections is Armie Hammer's suave young academic Oliver, who moves in to the family villa to assist Elio's professor father with some research. It's a romance rich in expectancy, as the two men circle each other, struggling to find the courage to make a connection. When they do, their passion is unmistakeable, and fervent. Without spoiling the end of the film, it climaxes with a truly touching instance of parental love and wisdom, in a graceful speech delivered by Michael Stuhlbarg as Elio's father.

On the phone from Milan, Guadagnino tells me how he overcame his initial reluctance in order to direct the film. "I didn't want to make a movie about beautiful Italy and lounging people by the pool, because I thought people already got that from me," he says. "But eventually the idea of these kids was very alluring to me. I think that when you resist something, there is a reason why, and you have to ask yourself why you are resisting."

The script was written by veteran writer-director James Ivory, who was initially planning to direct the film, with Shia LaBeouf and Greta Scacchi in the cast and

Guadagnino as producer. "I was working every day for many months to put together the movie for him," says Guadagnino. "Unfortunately, that version of the movie didn't see the light, and then the producers came to me and said, 'Would you direct it?' Eventually I said yes, because it was the way we found to make the movie happen."

That script went through several revisions before Guadagnino started shooting – the script, he observes, is just "the first brick of many bricks that help to build the house" – and there are a few significant differences between the novel and film. "It's my task, in order to be faithful to the novel, to betray the novel," he says. "When you translate any kind of text into a visual storyline, a cinema scene, you have to make sure you don't get crushed and overwhelmed by the weight of the source material."

Guadagnino has spoken before about the importance of cinema as a visual medium rather than a verbal one, an opinion he feels is falling out of fashion. "It's important that you realise that a movie is not a talking head – as unfortunately it is, more and more – but it's about people in space." *Call Me by Your Name*, with its exquisite art direction, heavy silences and carefully posed bodies, fulfils that ambition, despite its literary source. It's intriguing on this front that Guadagnino's previous film, *A Bigger Splash* (based on Jacques Deray's 1969 *La Piscine*), and his next, *Suspiria* (based on Dario Argento's 1977 horror film of the same name, about malevolent goings-on at a German dance academy), are both adaptations of movies rather than texts.

"You try to pay homage to the people that inspired you, like Aciman, and Dario Argento," he says. "Or you try to deflect yourself from something that is a source material that you are not very keen on, to do your own thing, like in *A Bigger Splash*. That was me basically wanting to go somewhere else because I wasn't inspired by the material in the first place. But in the case of *Suspiria*, the impact of that masterpiece on my life has been so great, that I can only pay homage to the effect that that movie caused in me, to make my version."

Guadagnino says he has wanted to film a version of *Suspiria* ever since he saw it as a teenager. "I saw the poster for it when I was 11 and that already was a trauma. Then I saw the movie at 14." His version, he hopes, will be a radical remake, without, he hints, Argento's dance academy setting. Drawing a line between his next and current films, he tells me that "*Suspiria* is about the horror of the mother" and *Call Me by Your Name* "is about the mother within the father". He defines the latter as "an element of femininity that is so fecund, so powerful and so full of the capacity of fertilisation that it is within each of us", referring to Pope John Paul I's description of God as being a mother as much as a father. Elio's parents are far from disapproving, discreetly supporting the romance, and the film gives his mother a more prominent role than the book did. Guadagnino says, "Elio was an extraordinary kid so he had to have extraordinary parents."

Aciman's novel is narrated by Elio as an older man, looking back on this formative romance, and situating it within his sexual history, but Guadagnino's film is definitely in the present tense, with no voiceover. Instead music, including songs by Sufjan Stevens that contribute to the mood of swooning romanticism, acts as, in Guadagnino's words "a very wonderful kind of intimate narrator to the movie without being a narrator".

The shift in time prompted a shift in space too. Where Aciman's story is set on the coast, near a holiday town, the film has moved inland, to Lombardy, where the director now lives. "When we decided that the movie was going to be about the present and not about a nostalgic backward gaze," Guadagnino says, "I found more interesting the idea of a setting that was more flat, less open; where the rhythm of the season, of the summer, was more lazy than the sea." Without the open coastal horizon, the lovers cannot look away: "Our characters were not gazing outside themselves but were really able to analyse inside each other and oneself." (One other detail from the novel was altered to subdue the director's fear of repetition: the swimming pool in the villa's garden was changed to a fountain.)

There was also another reason for the relocation. Guadagnino is an avowed disciple of Bernardo Bertolucci, a passion made clear by the documentary *Bertolucci on Bertolucci*, which he co-directed in 2013. "I always thought of this movie as a sort of homage to the cinema I love and it's not a mystery that I love Bertolucci's films," he explains. "This area borders the area where Bernardo has set many of his masterpieces. It was also a way to come back home, to the home of my cinema."

One of the lessons Guadagnino takes from his idol is to do with his actors. "Bernardo once said that every movie he made in a way is a feature about the characters and the story, but it's also a documentary about the actors who are embodying the characters. I do believe in that. And in order to film this documentary about your actors, you need them to be completely unguarded and generous. And deep. And they've been that."

Guadagnino, who uses the rehearsal period not to block the scenes but to get to know his actors – "understanding who is in front of you" – talks affectionately and proudly about his cast. Chalamet, who carries so much of the film, right up to a sustained, and terribly moving, but ambiguous final shot, "is a genius and he's a genius and he's a genius. I don't know how much I should repeat that." Hammer, who portrays the seemingly unattainable Oliver, with his movie-star looks and a maddeningly casual way of leaving every situation with the word 'later' is, for Guadagnino, "one of the greatest actors of his generation" and someone he had long wanted to work

**THAT'S AMORE**
**American academic Oliver (opposite, left, with Elio) travels to Italy to assist Elio's father, played by Michael Stuhlbarg (below, far left), in his studies of ancient statuary, in *Call Me by Your Name* by Luca Guadagnino (opposite, bottom)**

with. "Unfortunately I fell in love with him after making the movie," he says, "so now I am, in a way, miserable."

It's a demanding film for the cast, and Guadagnino commends their courage. "They weren't afraid of being exposed in the film," he says. While some critics have questioned why the sex scenes are not especially graphic – as well as querying the decision to cast heterosexual actors in the lead roles – explicitness here resides in the eye of the beholder. "It depends on the gaze of who sees the movie," says Guadagnino, "because many people find the movie sanitised and many people see the movie as very explicit."

Emotionally, the film is frank about Elio's first experience of love: from his lusty obsession to his heartbroken tears. The film lays bare many of the embarrassments of a teenage crush, as Elio writes melodramatic love notes and is mortified when Oliver walks into his bedroom when he is aroused. There are also a few furtive acts of worship and sexual experimentation, from inhaling the scent of Oliver's discarded swimming trunks to the notorious 'peach scene', which is recreated in the film faithfully, though necessarily less plainly than it is described by Aciman.

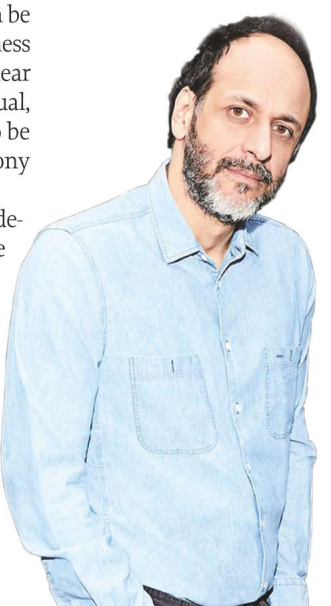
The beauty of love is shown too. This romance takes place in the magnificent stone villa and its surrounding countryside, and is embellished with the classical statuary studied by Elio's father, ripening fruit in the family orchard (Oliver greedily gulps down fresh apricot juice) and a sparkling lake. The film appears to be unashamedly seductive, but Guadagnino says that wasn't his aim. "It's something that you don't think about in a way that is conscious," he says. "You do the movie in a way you believe is truthful and honest and can be the best version possible of this film. Then it becomes seductive." He does admit that the film is intentionally bucolic ("We wanted the movie to look like a summer idyll") and credits his Thai cinematographer Sayombhu Mukdeeprom (who shot Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*), with achieving that soft summer glow: "A sort of glowing, constant amber beauty that comes from his Buddhist identity, and I found it so beautiful."

Guadagnino is insistently modest. I put it to him that he is eager to attribute the successes of the film to everyone but himself. He replies that cinema is "a collaborative effort. I am not shy when I say that the director has the duty to deliver the movie, in the nurse sense of the word. But I also believe that without the companionship, camaraderie and intelligence of the people around you, you are nothing, basically... Because it's a game, it can be made out of the fabric of enjoyment, instead of bleakness and torture. That's why I am a little sceptical when I hear stories about colleagues who like to work in conflictual, tortured environments. For me, it's already tiring to be there all day, so at least you want some sort of harmony [on set]."

The sexual tension between Oliver and Elio is also deliciously tangible, the will-they-won't-they suspense leading up to their first kiss: "This kind of anticipation and mystery, it's really thrilling," says Guadagnino. "So I wanted to try to build around that, around the fact that we are in the mind and heart of a young kid, who is anxiously anticipating something that he really wants, but he doesn't know where it is going to end up."

Love stories are timeless, but the older man's reluctance to embark on the affair, and the way that Elio sneers at his parents' gay friends, recall some dated attitudes, taking us back to the 1983 setting and the start of the Aids era. In the film, as in the book, when Elio first, hesitantly hints at his feelings for Oliver, the two men are admiring a memorial to the Battle of the Piave in World War I. The shadow of death, specifically the deaths of men their own age, seems to inspire not fear but a determination to seize the moment. Guadagnino is not strictly comfortable with metaphorical interpretations of his films ("Movies are movies and the audience should make their own mind"), but does say he enjoyed the resonance of the memorial to the lovers' youth. And when he talks about the film, he emphasises his characters' boldness and honesty, not their hesitation: "I don't see my characters as fearful of anything."

*It's my task, in order to be faithful to the novel, to betray the novel. When you translate any kind of text into a cinema scene, you have to make sure you don't get crushed by the source material*



The era itself is largely captured by details in the wardrobe, by former knitwear designer Giulia Piersanti, who also worked on *A Bigger Splash*. With the characters surrounded by ancient relics and stone walls, the 80s setting only breaks in through chinks: Elio's violet-striped sleeveless T-shirt, a night at a disco dancing to The Psychedelic Furs. Now, more than 30 years after the film is set, the fight for LGBTQ equality continues – just last year, for example, Italy granted same-sex couples the right to a civil union, but not a marriage. While Guadagnino is adamant that his film is not part of any particular campaign with regard to Italian legislation, he suggests it has a wider, more universal resonance: "If the movie is political, and I do believe every act of art or creativity is political, it is political because it is a movie about the transmission of knowledge and the importance of it."

This concept of the "transmission of knowledge" is at the heart of the film, he says. "I like the idea that the other changes you – and that there is no boundary; the power and the beauty of change coming from meeting another," he explains. Elio and Oliver share so much, and alter each other's lives for ever, becoming a part of each other, sharing an identity and exchanging names. Elio's father too has something very valuable to give to his son. "In the movie, everything that you believe, you get the privilege to pass to the other," Guadagnino says.

***Call Me by Your Name* is released in UK cinemas on 27 October and is reviewed on page 63**

# KILLER INSTINCT

*David Fincher's Netflix series 'Mindhunter' explores the genesis of behavioural profiling in the FBI in the 1970s. Here the director discusses psychosexual sadism and how to make sense of people who like cutting up hitchhikers*

**By Simran Hans**

**"You want to know, 'Why serial killers again?'"** says David Fincher. We're discussing his new Netflix series *Mindhunter*, which follows two special agents working in the FBI's newly established Behavioural Science Unit in the late 1970s, who travel the US interviewing serial killers, the better to understand the criminal mind in order to help the process of tracking down others. A filmmaker whose own visual style is precise to the point of forensic, Fincher has fine-tuned the murder mystery genre with crime thrillers including *Se7en* (1995), *Zodiac* (2007), *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011) and *Gone Girl* (2014). But what's interesting is not so much that Fincher keeps returning to stories about serial killers, but to stories about the people trying to catch them.

"I like the distilled nature of confronting something that's abhorrent," he explains. "Maybe that's coy. I like the notion of having a conversation with people who should be beneath our contempt, and the idea of a call for empathy." Based on the book *Mind Hunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit* by former FBI special agent John E. Douglas (with co-author Mark Olshaker), the series revolves around Holden Ford (played by Jonathan Groff) , a hostage negotiator turned criminal psychologist – and a thinly veiled fictional version of Douglas. Intelligent, idealistic and genuinely curious about the psychological impulse of criminality, Douglas was a thoroughly modern figure in the post-Hoover FBI. "If somebody demands the impossible, you can't just shoot them," says Ford to a class of trainee agents in *Mindhunter*'s first episode. An early adopter of criminal profiling at a time when psychology was still thought of as the terrain of 'backroom boys', Douglas also claims to have been the real-life inspiration behind both Thomas Harris's fictional, tormented Will Graham character in his *Red Dragon* novel (adapted for the first time by Michael Mann as *Manhunter* in 1986, and then by Brett Ratner in 2002), and Graham's superior at the FBI, Jack Crawford, as portrayed by Scott Glenn in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), Harvey Keitel in *Red Dragon* (2002) and Laurence Fishburne in NBC's *Hannibal* (2013-15).

Another scene in episode one sees Ford watching *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975). Observing Al Pacino's charismatic bank robber, he comments: "He was obviously disturbed, but I liked him." Fincher liked how in the Douglas book, he would describe the criminals he came across as "disarming". "You think of the golem, you think of the cave-dwelling Neanderthal, and then you're confronted with somebody who's wildly articulate and surprisingly introspective, and yet at the same time, a raging narcissist," he explains. "Ultimately, the show is about narcissism."

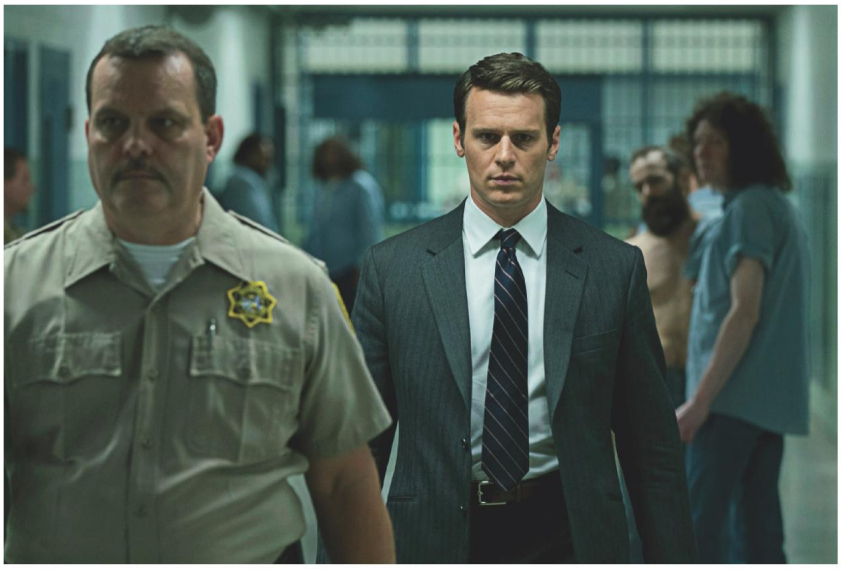
Developing *Mindhunter* with screenwriter Joe Penhall (*Enduring Love*, 2004; *The Road*, 2009), Fincher saw it as an opportunity to create "an interesting capsule for dramatic conversations that I would want to be present for, and that could be dramatised". The first two episodes, both directed by Fincher, offer a witty, thoughtful, pop psychology introduction to behavioural science. The show doesn't have the ticking-clock quality of his previous police procedurals, but its rhythms work in the context of episodic TV.

"What we had – which sort of makes the first hour oddly more cinematic than televisual – is that Ford doesn't know [how to do his new job]. He has an instinct that something's amiss, and that he's somehow underqualified for the task that he's been assigned, and I liked that. In television, you mostly need the expert. It's a very odd place to begin winding the audience up, because for the most part, people want to go, 'Well is this the guy who's gonna get me there, or not?'" *Mindhunter* recreates the moment when behavioural profiling – at least in the police force – was still uncharted territory.

Fincher found something inherently amusing in the idea that an FBI agent could be "compelled to inject empathy" into his role, given that "we inherently understand the FBI's role as judge, jury and executioner." *Mindhunter*'s FBI contingent are, as he puts it, "almost like the guys in *Reservoir Dogs*". "I didn't want to ridicule the FBI, but the reference materials that we were using were a lot more like 1971 [than its late 70s setting] in terms of how WASP-y they were. There was a lot of plaid, a lot of fat ties – we were very consciously trying to say, this is going to be Las Vegas, ultra-unchecked." In the wrong hands, it might feel a little clumsy. Here, it plays as irreverent comedy.

"Here was an organisation that was really founded so you could chase people across state lines – and fire machine guns at them – who suddenly had to redefine themselves. The way they dealt with Baby Face Nelson was not going to be the way that they were going to deal with Baby Face David Berkowitz," he says, comparing the notorious Prohibition-era bank robber, killed by the FBI in a shootout in 1934, to the serial killer 'Son of Sam', who terrorised New York in the mid-70s, confessed to his crimes and went to prison in 1977.

**AMERICAN PSYCHO**
**Jonathan Groff as empathetic FBI Special Agent Holden Ford (right), and Cameron Britton as Edmund Kemper (with Groff below), one of a number of real-life serial killers portrayed in the show**



**TOUCH OF EVIL**
**Jonathan Groff as criminal psychologist Holden Ford and Holt McCallany as colleague Bill Tench (with Thomas Francis Murphy, seated) in *Mindhunter*, the new series from David Fincher (opposite)**

(Berkowitz is named in the show, alongside the real-life serial killers Dennis Rader and Edmund Kemper.) "When you're talking about somebody who's compulsively drawn to segmenting hitchhikers, how do we make sense of that?"

Fincher wanted to explore what it might be like to go back to before these sort of law enforcement characters had become prime-time staples and "lock step with them as they went from case to case, fundamentally authoring what we know today as psychosexual sadism. At the time, it was *crime*. The notion of the artist's signature in some way being left behind, without them even being aware of it, seemed like an interesting nest to kick."

The artist's signature, pyschosexual sadism, segmented hitchhikers: these are recurrent motifs throughout Fincher's filmography. But he rejects the idea that *Mindhunter* is an attempt to excavate and re-examine his own fascination with these themes. "It wasn't about wanting to dredge that stuff and flaunt it on Main Street as much as it was the notion that there are these things that we sort of take for granted," he says.

Two of the show's ten episodes are directed by Asif Kapadia, best known for the collaged character study documentaries *Senna* (2010) and *Amy* (2015). The British filmmaker seems an interesting, if not obvious, fit for *Mindhunter*'s high-gloss, high-crime drama. "His connection to the material was interesting," Fincher says. "He said, 'What Holden is trying to do is how I made *Amy*. Before people would agree to be a part of my movie or tell me what troubled them about these last months of [Amy Winehouse's] life, I needed to put them at ease.' Holden was somebody whose inherent curiosity was something he related to." Fincher went so far as to use the particularities of Kapadia's inquisitiveness as a note for Groff. "I would say to Jonathan, look at the quality of [Kapadia's] listening. Because that needs to be part of Holden. It can't just be open-mouthed breathing and writing stuff down and nodding," he says. As well as Kapadia, Tobias Lindholm and Andrew Douglas also directed episodes. How did it feel for such an avowed perfectionist to hand over the reins? "It's an odd thing to produce for another director," Fincher admits. "I don't ever want somebody to feel that they got managed into doing something that was lesser than what they were capable of. I'm always fascinated by watching, because I've never really seen other people work."

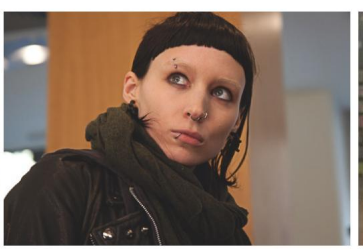
Watching how other people work may have been a new experience for Fincher, though it seems his filmmaker colleagues had been paying close attention to how he works. He is known for his notoriously fastidious approach, and the steps he sometimes takes to get the actors to "modify and inflect the work" – he was reported to have averaged 50 takes for every scene during the making of *Gone Girl*. "Both Asif and Tobias played with shooting 25, 30 takes. In some way, they were indulging themselves; you could see that they were starting to feel guilty about it," he says. "The only sin would be to spend all this time and not get it.

"Maybe it's all stupid," he continues. "But why are we trying to get done with this whole day before lunch? Why aren't we trying to maximise what we're all here to get? Normally, I don't use a lot of close-ups – for me, close-ups are mostly about getting really good audio. Over-the-shoulder, moving mediums, alternate masters – that's where I really want to make the geometry of the thing interesting. A lot of actors save themselves for the close-ups." He adds, "You want the thing that's going to reside on the server at Netflix to be the best version it can be, and so actors have to protect themselves, but I'm actively trying to get them to drop their defences all the time."

Fincher is celebrated for his ability to draw career-best performances from actors: "You have to prove to actors that you are watching them more intently and seeing them more completely than anyone else in the room," he says. Groff, who plays Ford with a kind of wholesome sharpness, had read for the part of Sean Parker in *The Social Network* (2010), but hadn't quite been able to match Justin Timberlake's oiliness; Fincher made a mental note to save him for another project. "He's fantastic, and he kind of looks like Sean Parker, but he literally doesn't have a single cell of venality in his body. It's not earnestness; he's legitimately curious about everything and everyone. That was something I felt Holden had to have."

Also impressive is Hannah Gross as Holden's clever, caustic girlfriend Debbie – both witty foil and levelling influence on his well-meaning squareness. "Hannah has this flat affect thing that she does; you lean into it, but it can be bloodcurdling. There's something I find so amusing about somebody who's that laconic. She reminded me of girls I knew in the 70s."

**TO CATCH A KILLER**
**David Fincher's previous big-screen crime thrillers include (below, from left) *Se7en* (1995), with Morgan Freeman; *Zodiac* (2007), with Robert Downey Jr and Jake Gyllenhaal; *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011), starring Rooney Mara; and *Gone Girl* (2014), with Ben Affleck and Rosamund Pike**



BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2)

Fincher talks about actors with an understanding that is both highly technical and entirely intuitive. It makes sense that he would be drawn to television projects, such as *House of Cards* (2013-), that could facilitate long-term collaborations between actor and director. The landscape of streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Instant and Hulu, and their projects, has changed rapidly in the four years since Fincher's first foray into the serial form. He was among the first directors of his generation – and his auteur prestige – to embrace these new platforms as an alternative to Hollywood, directing the initial two episodes of *House of Cards* as well as executive producing the show, which was one of Netflix's first critically acclaimed big hits. "*House of Cards* was designed to have a very specific back door," he says. "It was supposed to be a very specific two- or three-season arc [the show currently sits at five seasons and counting]. The initial ending was kind of the end of *The Godfather* [1972] or *The Conformist* [1970] or *The Candidate* [1972]. Like, what now? It started to slip into soap opera a little faster than I had envisioned.

"I look at my commitment to Netflix, and at the TV work of directors like Jane Campion, Steven Soderbergh and David Lynch – we are all pushing towards a new sandbox where you can work with talented people who may or may not have been able to get a break on network, or get a break in a Marvel movie.

"There's more money to spend, and with more money there's more time to get it right." He continues: "There's more planning that takes place in making a two-hour movie than there is in making ten hours of a season, but that's only because it's the Spelling-Goldberg model as opposed to the Kubrick model" – contrasting the moguls of 70s production-line TV with the film director's notorious multi-take meticulousness.

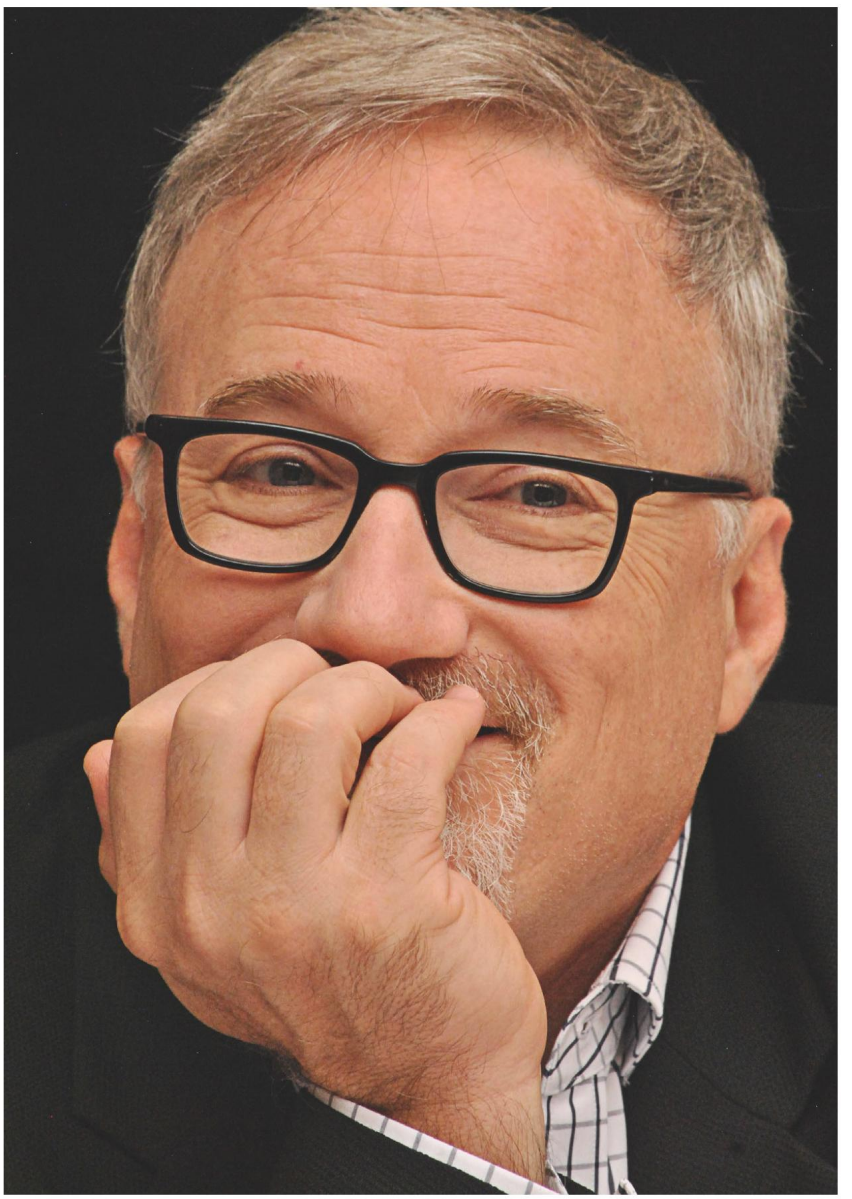
"In television, the race is on to have a library of something that you can sell off in different territories that will keep a healthy viewership – that's a very different thing than what I'm involved with at Netflix, in that we're trying to do slightly more languid movies. The idea of tugging something to create ratings and make stars in a world where the audience offers up their living room for an hour once a week – I don't think anybody would be surprised to hear I think that's dead.

"But the alternative to the movie business has yet to be defined, and that's what we're really in the process of doing. I cannot imagine a movie studio ever making *Zodiac* again; I can't imagine a movie studio making *The Game* [1997]. They're expensive and they're risky and they're odd and open-ended. That is the perfect purview for what television has become – a new venue to explore what used to be in mid-range movies. That part of the business is going to belong to television, or belong to the new purveyors of 'episodic chronological streaming content'." He grimaces. "There, I said it. But you know what I mean."

So is he optimistic? Adaptive rather than combative, with regard to the supposed 'death of movies'? "Now, look," he says: "Money ruins everything. The age when a movie can make a $30 million profit for a studio and they can be happy with that are over. When Disney makes a movie, and they put all of their apparatus behind us, and it makes $30 million, it's just not enough to keep the lights on in Burbank. When you're talking about profit margins that have to be nine digits, you invariably are going to crush out storytelling as cultural imperative.

"Odd human characters in stories are a cultural necessity," he says. "I watch a movie like *Close Encounters*, and think, there's somebody who has identified: 'I can take Area 51, and I can make it do a handshake with Watergate, and I can come up with something entirely life-affirming about a man leaving his clog-wearing *Hausfrau* wife in Gary, Indiana, or wherever it is, going up in an anti-gravity shopping mall to witness the secrets of the universe...' Now that's so weird, that is such a weird idea.

"I would not be as fascinated by the potential of cinema as I am today had I not seen that movie when I was 14 years old," he says. "I remember looking up at the sky in a different way, and in present-day Hollywood it's hard to imagine that somebody didn't say, 'You know Steven, what did his wife *do* that he wanted to leave her so badly?' She didn't do anything. He just had the opportunity to go to outer space, and he took it. But I do think Netflix would still make that movie." S



*I cannot imagine a movie studio ever making 'Zodiac' or 'The Game' again. They're expensive, risky, odd and open-ended. That is the perfect purview for what television has become*

**i** ***Mindhunter*** **screens on Netflix in the UK from 13 October**

PORTRAIT BY YORAM KAHANA/SHOOTING STAR/EYEVINE (c)

# ROOM AT THE TOP

*'The Death of Stalin', a viciously funny portrait of the jockeying for power that follows the demise of the Soviet dictator, bears all the hallmarks of the satirical genius of its director Armando Iannucci, showcasing a gallery of slightly rubbish people insulting each other in a hurry*

**By Ben Walters**

**Early on in Armando Iannucci's** *The Death of Stalin*, we join the leader and his coterie at his dacha late one night in 1953. The jokes and the vodka are flowing. "Everybody drinks!" says the old man and no one suggests otherwise. Fun times – if you overlook the paranoid hypervigilance necessary to survive this high-stakes camaraderie. One reveller will dictate scrupulous notes on his return home about which gags got a laugh and which turned the air cold. Another is scheduled for assassination within hours. And Stalin himself, fount of all this fear, is about to succumb to the fatal stroke that will throw the Soviet Union into disarray and prompt the absurd yet brutal manoeuvring that constitutes the film's story. The fate of the world could turn on a conversational slip, an impulsive lurch or an old grudge rekindled. "Not that I admire Margaret Thatcher," Iannucci says when we meet to discuss the film, "but I do admire one thing she said, which was that deferred decisions are usually better decisions."

Deferred decisions, like predictable events and the capacity to undertake bodily functions in peaceful repose, are rare luxuries in the political-procedural satirical

**RED HEAT**
**Adrian McLoughlin as Stalin, with Steve Buscemi, Jeffrey Tambor, Dermot Crowley, Paul Chahidi, Paul Whitehouse, Simon Russell Beale, and (right) Jason Isaacs as the bombastic Field Marshal Zhukov**

milieu that Iannucci has depicted over the past decade or so. *The Death of Stalin* is the culmination of this cycle, a hilarious, pacy, grotesque and sobering snapshot of the struggle for power in a totalising system rendered sclerotic by its own machinery of terror and control. Apparatchiks sleep in many layers, in anticipation of being dragged from their beds to the street; pallbearers plot statecraft while bearing bodies; the dead might even, under the right circumstances, be brought back just to keep you on your toes. At the centre is Stalin, given a Cockney bullyboy charm by Adrian McLoughlin that somehow lingers even after the character's death. His satellites include bovine deputy Malenkov (Jeffrey Tambor), monstrously composed secret police chief Beria (Simon Russell Beale), eager loyalist Molotov (Michael Palin) and the relatively reasonable Khrushchev (Steve Buscemi). Stalin's children Svetlana (Andrea Riseborough) and Vasily (Rupert Friend) are additional wild cards.

It's more highly strung than Iannucci's earlier work, yet recognisably of a piece with the television series *The Thick of It* (BBC, 2005-12), set in a middling UK government ministry, and *Veep* (HBO, 2012-), about a US vice-president and her staff, as well as Iannucci's debut feature *In the Loop* (2009), set in the run-up to a questionable war in the Middle East. Each project was developed in collaboration with its cast and writers, who included Jesse Armstrong, Simon Blackwell, Ian Martin and Tony Roche, and, every time, more or less mediocre politicians are haplessly harried by party wonks and enforcers, media snipers and, occasionally, actual voters. All are ensemble pieces marked by merciless backbiting, explosively imaginative swearing and deliciously distinctive standout characters (notably *The Thick of It*'s diabolical fixer Malcolm Tucker, played by Peter Capaldi, and *Veep*'s narcissistic Selina Meyer, played by Julia Louis-Dreyfus).

*The Death of Stalin* takes things up a notch in several respects. "I've deliberately forced myself out of my comfort zone by taking on a story that involves historic figures," Iannucci says. "It has stuff that isn't necessarily funny in it, dealing with moments that are about the truth." There are no voters here but many victims, with lives on the line within the Kremlin and across the USSR. "There's an undercurrent of nervousness which takes you in and out of the comedy and in and out of the drama because they're all connected by this level of hysteria that's building up."

The screenplay, by Iannucci, Martin, David Schneider and Peter Fellows, is adapted from Fabien Nury and Thierry Robin's graphic novel, whose narrative arc, deadpan humour and eye for historical detail the film retains. Feature-friendly changes are made, though, with months streamlined to feel like days and characters given more individual depth: Khrushchev gains a home life and an overt openness to reform, for instance, while the pompously floundering Malenkov is all about image management. There are mordantly funny new physical set pieces at Stalin's dacha, in front of his coffin and elsewhere, as well as extra doses of earthy slapstick involving bodily fluids and awkward corpses.

For Iannucci, one imperative was to nourish his ensemble, who offer a diverse range of styles that reflect the range of backgrounds of the real-life figures. "You've got to write more dialogue because if you read everything out from the graphic novel it would be over in 30 minutes," he says. "But also you've got this amazing group of performers so they've got to have something to get their teeth into. Once you've got them all together, you've got to have scenes in which the magic between them as an ensemble starts sparking." That magic plays out across a spectrum of registers, from bickering about piss on the carpet to pleading not to die. Indeed, *The Death of Stalin* makes a life-and-death matter of the kind of jockeying for power that has been the bread and butter of Iannucci's satirical cycle from the start. Both *The Thick of It* and *Veep* devoted considerable time to leadership struggles and succession crises, observing ambitious aspirants, in the words of one onlooker, "bobbing around like Emperor penguins trying to swap an egg".

In 2005, *The Thick of It* was consciously conceived as a shoestring production apt to the limited budgets of fledgling digital channel BBC4. Its restricted *mise en scène* – small clutches of people in inexpensive suits flapping around banal, flatly lit offices, captured over shoulders and round corners in peeping, faintly panicked handheld shots – perfectly suited its on-the-fly world of policy hackwork, image management and career manoeuvring. As Iannucci's satirical cycle has evolved, the narrative, political and moral stakes have been steadily ratcheted up, matched by growing budgets and production values.

*In the Loop* went transatlantic, evocatively sketching the political landscapes of Washington and New York as well as Westminster while actual armed conflict heaved into view – even if the only visible lived experiences from outside the political bubble related to banal local constituency shenanigans. Then *Veep* whisked us, motorcade blaring, into the West Wing and the most powerful, consequential office in the world – even if, at first, it made us skulk outside the door, geopolitics afoot at one tantalising remove, always ready for the call that seemed like it would never come. Now *The Death of Stalin* drops us into the belly of the Soviet beast to join a group of bloody-handed veteran statesmen at a juncture

of world-historical import. The lives of millions – perhaps billions – are in the balance, yet the basic register of slightly rubbish people insulting each other in a hurry is recognisable from the first episode of *The Thick of It*. "The interpersonal dynamic is there," Iannucci agrees, "but also it's a case of trying to survive because the alternative is to be shot, rather than being demoted or getting Fisheries. And not just shot, but your family shot too."

The sense of fly-on-the-wall observation remains consistent too, even if the world depicted in *The Death of Stalin* is less contemporary and familiar. The production design and location work evoke a sense of lived-in period detail derived from extensive research but worn lightly. "We're not revelling in what we've built," Iannucci says, "but it's there to remind you that this really happened." At the same time, the observational mode is balanced by more conspicuously expressive turns, such as stately tracking shots of imposing architecture and massed ranks of troops or a civilian massacre rendered with quiet pathos. "It would have been easier to halve the budget and just shoot it in some rooms

*The film is about what happens when the system itself has started to rot and nobody knows morally where the centre is any more*

but I wanted to get that sense that this has impact," Iannucci says. "The things they're deciding here do affect millions of lives out there and I wanted to show what 'out there' was."

There are also flourishes – such as a cod-heroic slow-motion cape-shucking introduction to Jason Isaacs's bombastic Field Marshal Zhukov – that would have jarred against the formal deadpan of *The Thick of It*, *In the Loop* or *Veep* but which echo the promiscuous, eclectic tone of the director's offbeat TV comedies *The Armando Iannucci Shows* (2001) and *Time Trumpet* (2006). "They were full of fantastical films with different styles," Iannucci says. "I did lots of storyboards, working with special effects people, loads of locations, and I really enjoyed that. I felt confident about going back to that other method and it not being about shaky camera but actually, 'We'll go to this, then we'll stay wide, then the music will take us through to that...' Not in order to feel artsy, but because this is how I want this story to develop."

Iannucci's interest in backstairs politicking succeeded earlier shows skewering news media (*The Day Today*, 1994) and unleashing Alan Partridge on the world (*Knowing Me, Knowing You*, 1994; *I'm Alan Partridge*, 1997-2002).

**THE GREAT DICATOR**
**Simon Russell Beale as the monstrously composed secret police chief Beria and Jeffrey Tambor as bovine deputy Malenkov (right); director Armando Iannucci on set with Adrian McLoughlin as Stalin (above)**

Now that interest seems to have run its course, not least because the times have changed. Real-world political discourse has cannibalised Iannucci's material. *The Thick of It*'s joke insults, such as 'omnishambles', have been co-opted for use in the House of Commons, and its joke policies, such as monitoring spare rooms and rationing plastic bags, have become law. These days, the utterances of the real president of the United States sit better when overlaid with the theme from *Veep* by YouTube remixers than when broadcast straight on the evening news. Iannucci calls Trump a "self-basting satirist", doing the jester's work for him, modelling himself on "the Hollywood idea of a dystopian presidency". How do you mock that?

The centre-ground triangulation of the New Labour era – the notion of jockeying for power within a stable, consensus-driven polity – seems dated, even quaint, in a period when the fundamental premises of political discourse are newly and strangely up for grabs. *The Death of Stalin* has been in the works since before voters approved Brexit or Trump but it feels timely because its combatants are wrangling not only over who wins but over who gets to define the rules of the game. There are lines in the film that seem painfully current. "We're in a new reality." "You're bending and cracking the truth like a human body." "This is how people get killed: when their stories don't fit." We've gone beyond shabby compromise and personal venality. Now the abyss yawns. This, Iannucci suggests, is the spirit that haunts his new film: "It's about what happens when the system itself has started to rot and nobody knows morally where the centre is any more."

*The Death of Stalin*'s end credits play out to a montage of photographed faces being scratched out and doctored away – a reminder that Russia's current pre-eminence in the fields of fake news and alternative facts is not without precedent. It seems apt, if depressing, that the film itself has now become embroiled in such discourse. In the days before we speak, voices within Russia (including a Communist Party spokesman and a Kremlin cultural adviser) have castigated the feature as a "planned provocation" and "psychological warfare", and international press have speculated about a potential ban. To Iannucci, this all says less about the fate of his film than about the state of journalism. "We've got a distributor in Russia and they're sorting it out," he says. "Nothing has happened. A person in Russia said, 'I don't like this film.' A man has said a thing. But the media has to fill its space with stuff."

Iannucci has several projects in development, none set in the world of politics. He is working with Steve Coogan and writers Neil and Rob Gibbons on Alan Partridge's triumphant return to the BBC ("He's survived! God bless him"). There's a comedy pilot in the works for HBO about "space tourism, set in about 40 years' time". And, for BBC Films, he's making a feature adaptation of *David Copperfield*, a project he sees as timely. "It's to do with austerity and materialism and mental illness," he says. "I'm still going to do it set in Victorian times but I'm not going to do it as the chocolate-box Dickens – cobbled streets and all that." The novel's opening also presents opportunities for formal experimentation based around some of the least cynical or political of concerns. "It's very impressionistic," Iannucci says. "It's a little boy seeing colours and shapes and hearing words."

***The Death of Stalin* is released in UK cinemas on 20 October and is reviewed on page 64**

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# TEARS AND LAUGHTER

## FEMALE STARS OF GOLDEN AGE JAPANESE CINEMA

Many of the greatest Japanese films made in the early decades after World War II explore the everyday experiences of women struggling to find their place in a conservative culture during an era of rapid social and technological change. As a result, the films owe much of their power and sophistication to their leading ladies – actresses such as Tanaka Kinuyo, Hara Setsuko, Takamine Hideko and Kyo Machiko – who were often as instrumental in shaping the meaning of their directors' films as their directors were in shaping their performances. **By Alexander Jacoby**

"If you want to say something about Japan," declared actress Hidari Sachiko in the 1970s, "you have to focus on women." Many of the canonical Japanese films are studies of female experience, and in the early post-war decades especially, the subtlety and power of Japanese film was in large part due to its many great actresses, whose rich, nuanced performances helped to dramatise what it meant to live as a woman during the dramatic social transformations affecting the country in the 20th century.

A woman whose adult life spanned the long Showa era (1926-89) would have witnessed and participated in a series of unprecedented changes. She would have been born in the early years of the 20th century in a rapidly developing country, where feudal ideas jostled with modernity and where indigenous and Western values were in perpetual tension. The regime of the Meiji Emperor (1868-1912) had promoted the conservative notion of *ryosai kenbo* ('Good Wife, Wise Mother') as a female ideal, yet women were central to the burgeoning Japanese economy, particularly in the crucial textile industry. In the early Showa period, while some women dressed traditionally in kimono, others adopted Western clothes, hairstyles and demeanour as so-called 'modern girls' or *moga*. But most still found husbands through *omiai* – not quite an arranged marriage, but a guided process of matchmaking. And the average woman bore four or five children; pro-natalist policies were favoured by the militarist government of the 1930s and 1940s.

The end of World War II had a transformative effect on the situation of Japanese women. Women gained the vote, and, in 1946, 39 female candidates were elected to parliament. The American-influenced 1947 constitution incorporated several provisions for women's rights, including a clause of sexual equality and a guarantee of the freedom to choose a spouse; in the same year, the Labour Standards Act established protections for female workers. Increasingly visible Western models shaped the behaviour and appearance of many women. At the same time, social mores remained in some ways relatively conservative through the later Showa era. The parliamentary breakthrough of 1946 proved a false dawn; late 20th-century politics was overwhelmingly male-dominated. Wages for female workers were considerably lower than for male ones, and many women worked in part-time or temporary jobs. Women tended to retire on marriage; the Western-style nuclear family, with one male breadwinner, had become standard. There were very few births out of wedlock, and divorce rates were exceptionally low. In some ways, the values of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' were still an everyday reality.

*Just as Barbara Stanwyck could be comedienne and femme fatale, so Tanaka Kinuyo could be wife and mother, geisha and actress*

The poster for Mizoguchi Kenji's *Oyu-Sama* (1951)

The film industry had been a wholly male arena in the earliest years of Japanese cinema; until the early 1920s, female roles were played by male actors, as in the kabuki theatre. But by the post-war era, the cinema was, in part, a refuge for women who did not want to follow the standard life path: actresses often made choices that were not readily available to ordinary Japanese women. At a time when a single, lifelong marriage was overwhelmingly the norm, Hara Setsuko remained unmarried throughout her long life, while Yamada Isuzu had four husbands, as well as a significant non-marital relationship with director Kinugasa Teinosuke. Above all, though, the tensions surrounding women in Japanese society were artistically reflected in the nation's cinema, which over the decades dramatised female experience with complexity, precision and power.

The Japanese cinema of the mid-20th century was, like the Hollywood of the same period, a flourishing studio system. Both production and exhibition were dominated by the major studios (Shochiku, Daiei and Toho, to be joined during the 1950s by Toei and the revived Nikkatsu), for whom directors and stars worked under contract. As in Hollywood, actors and actresses established clearly defined yet flexible star personae. Just as Barbara Stanwyck could be comedienne and femme fatale, self-sacrificing mother and career woman, so Tanaka Kinuyo could be wife and mother, gangster's moll and artist's model, geisha and actress, peasant and aristocrat. But the different roles were united by what Kinoshita Chika has identified as the "crucial properties of

One step at a time: Takamine Hideko as a determined bar hostess in Naruse Mikio's *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs* (1960)

Tanaka's acting", such as "her smooth, prompt and light way of walking; fluid but restless gestures; inclination to avoid eye contact; and ambiguity in facial expressions".

Among the studios, Shochiku had deliberately targeted female audiences since the silent era. The studio's formidable boss, Kido Shiro, observed that "the fact the old moralistic ideas have a repressive stranglehold on women" furnished dramatic material; but he also had an eye on commercial prospects, believing that women were more likely to bring friends, family or boyfriends with them to the cinema. Indeed, the Shochiku-produced women's melodrama *What Is Your Name?* (*Kimi no na wa*, 1953), focusing on a couple who meet during a wartime air raid but lose each other after failing to exchange names, became the biggest box-office hit of its time. In the 1950s, other studios also made efforts to court the female market: Daiei made a considerable number of melodramas centred on mothers or working women, while Naruse Mikio directed women's films at Toho.

The Japanese cinema, claim film historians Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie, is "a director's cinema", but the films of the great Japanese directors are vitally defined by the personae and presence of their actresses. It is impossible to think of Ozu Yasujiro without recalling the smiling serenity of Hara Setsuko, or of Naruse Mikio without remembering the tender determination of Takamine Hideko. Both those women have been credited with an intuitive understanding of the kind of performances their respective directors wanted; years after Naruse's death, Takamine said that if she were called on to appear in a Naruse film she would still know exactly how to act. Yet the great actresses of the Japanese cinema were often as instrumental in shaping the meaning of their directors' films as their directors were in shaping their performances; they were creators as well as interpreters. Speaking of his two most regular actresses, Yamada Isuzu and Tanaka Kinuyo, even as controlling a director as Mizoguchi Kenji was obliged to admit, "There was no point in making minute directions in their roles. All I could do is bend with their styles and find the right rhythm for their movements."

The older generation of Japanese stars active in the post-war era included many who had started their careers before the war. Tanaka Kinuyo (born in 1909) was acting in films by the late 1920s; Yamada Isuzu (born in 1917) was a star by the mid-1930s; Hara Setsuko (born in 1920) played major roles from 1937.

**A long way down: Tanaka Kinuyo in Mizoguchi Kenji's *Women of the Night* (1948)**

## 1 Yamada Isuzu

In her controversial collaborations with director Mizoguchi Kenji, *Osaka Elegy* (*Naniwa ereji*) and *Sisters of Gion* (*Gion no kyodai*), both released in 1936, Yamada exemplified the pre-war 'modern girl': career-oriented, commercially minded and sexually available. In the former, she plays a switchboard operator who descends into delinquency as she embarks on an illicit affair. Associated with technology and communication, her profession is the archetypal symbol of modernity. The heroine of *Sisters of Gion*, by contrast, is a geisha, yet here Yamada's character rejects the traditions of her profession, dressing in Western costume when not on duty, and rejecting the expectation of fidelity to a male patron.

Yamada's post-war work too was to sustain this penchant for transgressive female characterisations: in Ozu's most melodramatic film, *Tokyo Twilight* (*Tokyo boshoku*, 1957), she is a mother who has abandoned her children; in Kurosawa Akira's *The Lower Depths* (*Donzoko*, 1957), she is an exploitative and spiteful landlady; in Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (*Kumonosu-jo*, 1957), she is the Lady Macbeth character. The latter role demonstrated her versatility; as Yamada enacts the character's mental breakdown, an eerie, controlled stasis gives way to sudden, rapid, agitated movements.

*Takamine's talents were displayed above all in her collaborations with Naruse Mikio – the most famous being 'Floating Clouds'*

In 1947, Yamada starred in Kinugasa's *Actress* (*Joyu*), the biopic of the leading early 20th-century stage actress, Matsui Sumako, who made a name for herself in the role of Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* – a crucial proto-feminist play – only to commit suicide in 1919 after the death of her lover and director, Shimamura Hogetsu.

## 2 Tanaka Kinuyo

In competition with Kinugasa's *Actress*, Mizoguchi directed his own version of the story, *The Love of Actress Sumako* (*Joyu Sumako no koi*), with Matsui played by Tanaka Kinuyo, who by this time had become Mizoguchi's favourite actress, and who was his key collaborator in the last decade of his career. In the late 1940s, they worked together on a sequence of feminist melodramas. In *Victory of Women* (*Josei no shori*, 1946), Tanaka played a lawyer defending a female client accused of murdering her child; in *Women of the Night* (*Yoru no onnatachi*, 1948), she was a prostitute in the inhospitable environment of war-damaged Osaka. In *My Love Has Been Burning* (*Waga koi wa moenu*, 1949), a masterpiece of feminist melodrama, she played the wife of a 19th-century liberal politician whose enlightened values do not extend into his own home. Mizoguchi and Tanaka jointly produced one of the cinema's most radical feminist statements – going far beyond the liberal expectations of the American occupiers. Yet Tanaka's simultaneous air of vulnerability and resilience also made her indelible as the wise, tolerant, understanding

**Yamada Isuzu in *Osaka Elegy* (1936)**

**Takamine Hideko in *Floating Clouds* (1955)**

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2)

and suffering heroines of *Ugetsu monogatari* (1953) and *Sansho the Bailiff* (*Sansho dayu*, 1954).

In fact, Tanaka gave outstanding performances for almost all of the great Japanese directors. Her range is typified by her collaborations with Kinoshita Keisuke: at the beginning of the 1950s, in *Wedding Ring* (*Konyaku yubiwa*, 1950), she was still able to play a sensual romantic lead, falling in love with the doctor (played by Mifune Toshiro) treating her ailing husband; by 1958, she was totally convincing as the old woman preparing for death in Kinoshita's *The Ballad of Narayama* (*Narayama bushiko*). To bring verisimilitude to the harrowing scene in which she bashes out her teeth with a stone, the actress famously had several of her own teeth removed. Tanaka also became Japan's first successful female director, realising an impressive series of feminist melodramas in the 1950s and 1960s.

## 3 Hara Setsuko

Beside these assertive stars, Hara Setsuko may seem a gentler, softer presence. She is famous for a persona which appears, on the surface, untroubled and accepting, exemplified by the radiant smile with which she answers "Yes" to the question "Isn't life disappointing?" in Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (*Tokyo monogatari*, 1953). Japanese audiences thought of her as an "eternal virgin". But this is a sentimentalisation of an actress more appropriately defined by what the critic Robin Wood calls "resistance to definition". In Ozu's famous 'Noriko trilogy' – *Late Spring* (*Banshun*, 1949), *Early Summer* (*Bakushu*, 1951) and *Tokyo Story* – she plays, respectively, two young women reluctant to marry in accordance with social expectations, and a widow with no desire to remarry. In other films, her characterisations were still more subversive. In Naruse's *Sound of the Mountain* (*Yama no oto*, 1954), she has an abortion rather than be trapped in a loveless marriage. And she is seen again in flight from a loveless marriage in Ozu's *Tokyo Twilight*, in which she plays a much darker character than Noriko.

## 4 Takamine Hideko

Though a few years younger than the three actresses mentioned above, Takamine Hideko was not a new face on screen, having been a popular child star by around 1930 and a teenage idol during the war. But it was in the 1950s and 1960s that she made her greatest impact, and her star persona – gently forceful, active, determined and aspirational – is of a piece with the post-war mood. Takamine's talents were displayed above all in her many collaborations with Naruse. The most famous of these, and the most respected by Japanese critics, is *Floating Clouds* (*Ukigumo*, 1955), based, like many of Naruse's films, on a novel by the important female author Hayashi Fumiko. This tale of obsessive love is certainly Naruse's most melodramatic film, and in some respects uncharacteristic. But the sheer tenacity and passion of the character played by Takamine sheds light on the determination and strength of the bar hostess she played in *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs* (*Onna ga kaidan o agaru toki*, 1960) or the emotional depth of the widowed shopkeeper discomfited by the advances of her brother-in-law in *Yearning* (*Midareru*, 1964).

**A tale of two sisters: Arima Ineko and Hara Setsuko in Ozu Yasujiro's *Tokyo Twilight* (1957)**

Takamine too made a major impact in films by other directors. For Toyoda Shiro, in *Wild Geese* (*Gan*, 1953), she movingly played a moneylender's unhappy mistress drawn to a goodhearted student. Her subtlety as a performer helped imbue this sad story with a hint of redemption: at the climax of the film, Donald Richie writes, "Toyoda's camera turns to catch her face, and finds hope." As with Tanaka, Takamine's versatility can be indicated by two famous roles for Kinoshita Keisuke: in Japan's first commercial full-length feature film in colour, *Carmen Comes Home* (*Karumen kokyo ni kaeru*, 1951), she displayed an impeccable comic timing as the stripper scandalising her conservative hometown in rural Nagano prefecture; in the great melodrama *Twenty-Four Eyes* (*Nijushi no hitomi*, 1954), she acted with delicate pathos as the island schoolteacher whose pupils grow to adulthood in time to suffer the trauma of World War II.

**Memoirs of a geisha: Kyo Machiko in *Clothes of Deception* (1951)**

**Smoke signals: Awashima Chikage in *An Inlet of Muddy Water* (1953)**

**Tokyo story: Wakao Ayako in Masumura Yasuzo's *The Blue Sky Maiden* (1957)**

## 5 Kyo Machiko

Also personifying the tough, active post-war woman was Kyo Machiko. Ironically, her most famous role in the West is one of her more limited: the ambiguous heroine of Kurosawa's fable of inaccessible truth, *Rashomon* (1950), may have been a victim or may have been a femme fatale, but neither characterisation is sketched in particular depth. Much richer was her performance the following year in Yoshimura Kozaburo's outstanding *Clothes of Deception* (*Itsuwareru seiso*, 1951), in which she plays a geisha in the Gion District of Kyoto. Trapped by both Japan's ancient capital and her profession, she nevertheless marshals her commercial acumen and streetwise outlook to protect her younger sister, who, in archetypically modern fashion, works for the tourist board, and who hopes to marry against her mother's wishes.

Kyo was to go on to play the formidable ghost princess in *Ugetsu monogatari* and the delinquent elder sister in Naruse's *Older Brother, Younger Sister* (*Ani imoto*, 1953). Many of the characterisations Kyo created are unsympathetic, but all are united by the confidence and sensuality which were her trademarks. Still alive, as of this writing, aged 93, Kyo is one of the last links to the Japanese cinema's early post-war Golden Age.

*Wakao Ayako was well-suited to the insistent modernity and scabrous social commentary in Masumura Yasuzo's films*

## 6 Wakao Ayako and Okada Mariko

The generation of actresses represented by Takamine and Kyo, who had reached adulthood around the end of World War II, played women who were both tough and vulnerable, who had been both battered and strengthened by the experience of war and deprivation. But by the end of the 1950s, a new generation of women was coming to the fore in Japan: still children during the war, they had come of age in the hopeful post-war dispensation. Stars such as Wakao Ayako and Okada Mariko (both born in 1933, nearly a decade after Takamine) personified a generation that possessed, perhaps for the first time in Japanese history, the confidence of affluence, and which was more likely to embrace novel modes of thought and ways of life.

Both established themselves with films for classical directors: Wakao came to critical notice as the rebellious younger geisha Eiko in Mizoguchi's *Gion Festival Music* (*Gion bayashi*, 1953) and also played a leading role in the director's last film, *Street of Shame* (*Akasen chitai*, 1956). Okada appeared in Ozu's *Late Autumn* (*Akibiyori*, 1960) and *An Autumn Afternoon* (*Sanma no aji*, 1962). But both were better suited to the new modes of Japanese filmmaking emerging at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s.

Wakao was to become particularly associated with Masumura Yasuzo, who brought a European-influenced freshness and flair to Japanese film, and to whose insistent modernity and scabrous social commentary Wakao was well suited. In his *The Blue Sky Maiden* (*Aozora musume*, 1957), she plays the illegitimate daughter of a businessman, and her arrival in her father's Tokyo home exposes the tensions and hypocrisies underlying the order of Japanese society. Wakao's startlingly liberated persona is highlighted when, to quote critic Jonathan Rosenbaum, "she winds up denouncing [her father] in his sickbed and getting him to admit his errors, in a scene that must have shocked Japanese audiences at the time". Later, she would play the nurse in Masumura's grim war film *The Red Angel* (*Akai tenshi*, 1966), enduring sexual outrage on the Chinese front.

Okada's liberated, active persona was strongly revealed in Yoshimura Kozaburo's *A Woman's Uphill Slope* (*Onna no saka*, 1960), in which she superbly played an assertive young businesswoman, running a traditional sweetmaking firm, who finds fulfilment in work after disappointment in love. She was to make her greatest impact, though, working with New Wave director Yoshida Kiju (aka Yoshida Yoshishige), who became her husband. Their first collaboration, *An Affair at Akitsu* (*Akitsu onsen*, 1962) seems like a summation of the traditions of Shochiku melodrama, but also a new departure, heralding the series of so-called 'anti-melodramas' on which they were to work after leaving the studio for independent production.

## 7 Sugimura Haruko, Awashima Chikage and Kuga Yoshiko

Beyond these representative figures, the post-war Japanese cinema was routinely enriched by the presence of a broader roster of outstanding actresses, each with her own distinct star persona that dramatised particular aspects of the changing personal and social realities of the time.

The cynical and formidable characterisations of Sugimura Haruko, an Ozu regular, seem to encapsulate the darker side of post-war capitalism: her appearance in *Tokyo Story* as Shige, the selfish proprietor of a beauty parlour, is indelible, as is her depiction of a wholly materialistic former geisha and moneylender in Naruse's *Late Chrysanthemums* (*Bangiku*, 1954).

Awashima Chikage's star persona balanced cool irony and dogged perseverance, the former visible in her funny-sad performance in Toyoda's *Marital Relations* (*Meoto zenzai*, 1955) as the geisha negotiating a complicated relationship with the heir to a respectable merchant family, the latter typified by the climax of Naruse's *Summer Clouds* (*Iwashigumo*, 1958), in which she ploughs the fields in one of the Japanese cinema's iconic depictions of female self-determination.

The subtle strength of Kuga Yoshiko is displayed in Gosho Heinosuke's *Elegy of the North* (*Banka*, 1957), in which she gives a performance of sombre determination as a young woman in love with a married man.

All three of these actresses featured in *An Inlet of Muddy Water* (*Nigorie*, 1953). Directed by Imai Tadashi and based on the geisha stories of 19th-century female novelist Higuchi Ichiyo, this portmanteau film beat even *Tokyo Story* and *Ugetsu* to take the number one spot in the venerable *Kinema Junpo* film magazine annual critics' poll. Whatever one thinks of that decision, the quality of the film owes much to the excellence of the actresses who brought the world of the geisha to life with such meticulous realism and detail.

In the post-war era, Japanese actresses both re-enacted traditional models and sketched out new modes of female conduct. Director Toyoda Shiro, asked by Donald Richie why Japan's actresses were better than its actors, replied that Japanese women "have to practise acting all of their lives". Yet at a time when women's rights and women's roles were more contested than ever before or (perhaps) since, the Japanese cinema, and its great actresses, not only played roles, but helped to script them.

**The *Sight & Sound* Deep Focus season 'Tears and Laughter: Women in Japanese Melodrama' plays at BFI Southbank, London, from 16 October to 31 November**

Okada Mariko in *An Affair at Akitsu* (1962)

TANAKA KINUYO

# MARRIED TO CINEMA

The great actress Tanaka Kinuyo was the first Japanese woman to develop a significant career as a director in mainstream cinema

**By Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández**

**Tanaka Kinuyo is rightly renowned as one of the greatest actors in the history of Japanese cinema. However, her prestige as an actor has overshadowed her parallel career as a film director, and most of the films she directed are hard to track down.**

**Tanaka was the second female director in Japan, after the wartime filmmaker Sakane Tazuko, but she was the first to develop a significant career in mainstream cinema. Working within the studio system, Tanaka directed six features between 1953 and 1962, and was the only female director active during the golden age of Japanese cinema in the 1950s.**

**Japanese actresses of the period typically retired young, when they got married, but Tanaka – who entered the film world in the 1920s in her teens – never married or had children. She often said that she chose instead to marry cinema. In 1953, the year she made her debut as a director with *Love Letter*, Tanaka**

*'The Eternal Breasts' portrayed an audacious female subject able to express and reclaim her sexual desires and subjectivity*

**was 43 years old and facing the quandary of what to do in the face of competition from so many middle-aged Japanese actresses, with ever fewer opportunities to play interesting parts. Her move to the director's chair should be seen in that context, but it was also inspired and made possible by the transformations that had occurred in Japanese society after World War II. Changes such as women being granted the right to vote, and the provision in the post-war constitution for legal equality of the sexes particularly affected the social position of women in Japan. "After the war, the advancement of women became evident in every aspect of [Japanese] society, including the entrance of women in parliament," Tanaka said in 1975. "I too felt like trying to do something new by working as a female director."**

**Tanaka's star status and her contacts in the industry played in her favour, allowing her to direct films with different studios and to collaborate with a wide range of stars, and technical and artistic staff. Her ties with the great directors of the period also proved important (even if her great collaborator Mizoguchi Kenji was vocally resistant to her move to directing): Naruse Mikio employed her as his assistant for two months during the shooting of his *Older Brother, Younger Sister* (1953), and Kinoshita Keisuke and Ozu Yasujiro, respectively,**

*The Eternal Breasts* (1955)

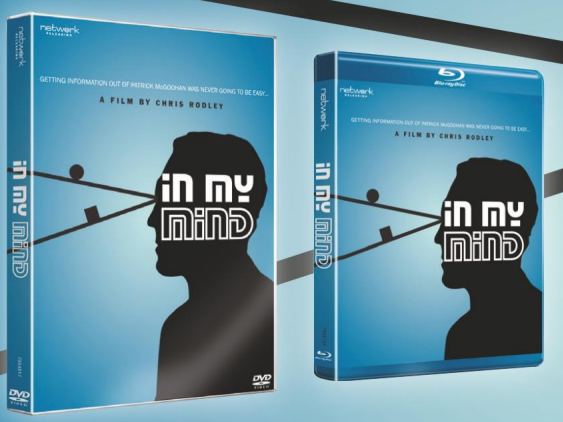
**wrote the scripts of her first two films, *Love Letter* and *The Moon Has Risen* (1955).**

**The six films Tanaka directed, while moving broadly within the conventions of the romantic melodrama with which she was mostly associated as an actress, disrupted the dominant representations of women in Japanese cinema of the time. In two of her films, Tanaka looks at the ubiquitous figure of the prostitute. In *Love Letter*, the national (male) trauma of the war defeat is represented through the story of a returning Japanese soldier who discovers that his beloved girlfriend had a relationship with an American official after the war, and dismisses her as a '*panpan*' (streetwalker prostitute). In her fifth film, *Girl of Dark* (1961), Tanaka explored the issue from another angle, depicting the struggle of a former prostitute to change her life after the enforcement of the Anti-Prostitution Law of 1956. Her most celebrated film, *The Eternal Breasts* (1955), portrayed the tragic fight of a female poet against breast cancer – not in terms of victimhood, but as the emergence of an audacious female subject able to express and reclaim her sexual desires and subjectivity.**

**The central place of female characters and women's issues in Tanaka's filmography was in part a reflection of the wider Japanese cinema of the time, but it also reveals a deliberate approach on her part. Tanaka was acutely conscious that she was a rare anomaly as a female director, and deliberately constructed spaces to allow for other female authorship and subjectivity. She worked with female scriptwriters such as Tanaka Sumie on *The Eternal Breasts* and *Girl of Dark*, and Wada Natto in *The Wandering Princess* (1960) – all films adapted from biographical accounts or novels by female authors, and focused on the multifaceted experiences of female protagonists, who in turn were played by charismatic stars such as Tsukioka Yumeji or Kyo Machiko. Her last film, and the only *jidai-geki* (period drama) of her career, *Love Under the Crucifix* (1962), was produced by Ninjin Kurabu, a film company founded by three actresses – Kuga Yoshiko, Kishi Keiko and Arima Ineko (who also starred in the film). The idea behind the project also came through a woman, executive producer Nagashima Hisako. It's high time that Tanaka's achievements as a director were more widely appreciated – and seen – alongside her unassailable position as one of Japanese cinema's greatest actors.**

# GETTING INFORMATION OUT OF PATRICK McGOOHAN WAS NEVER GOING TO BE EASY...

A FILM BY CHRIS RODLEY

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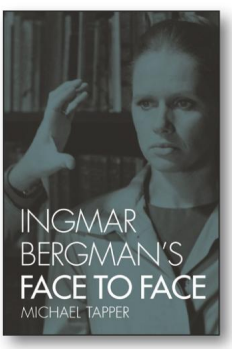
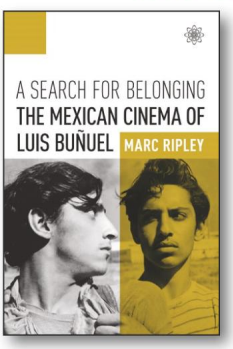



### Ingmar Bergman's *Face to Face*

MICHAEL TAPPER

**"*Face to Face* superbly mirrors the times in which it was made, yet is saturated with issues that remain relevant today. An added feature of this book is that it includes never before published material, for instance the director's diaries in the Ingmar Bergman Foundation Archive."**

—Maaret Koskinen, Stockholm University

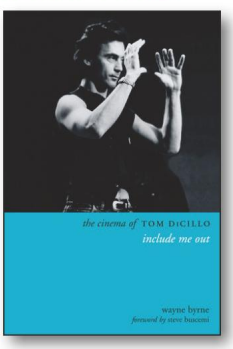



### A Search for Belonging

*The Mexican Cinema of Luis Buñuel*

MARC RIPLEY

This book focuses on nine of the director's films made in Mexico in order to show that a concerted focus on space, an important aspect of the films' narratives that is often intimated by scholars, yet rarely developed, can unlock new philosophical meaning in this rich body of work.




### The Cinema of Tom DiCillo

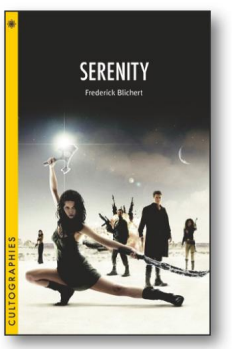
*Include Me Out*

WAYNE BYRNE

*Foreword by Steve Buscemi*

**"A candid and behind-the-scenes look at DiCillo's Hollywood, independent, fictional, and documentary filmmaking."**

—Sarah Sitwell, University of Utah




### Serenity

FREDERICK BLICHERT

A minor box-office success upon first release, *Serenity* continues to be a sci-fi favorite, attracting fans, cosplayers, fan fiction authors, and more to conventions and charity screenings internationally. This book examines the relationship between the film and its peculiar cult following, largely established before a cult object even existed.

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# Reviews

## 75 The Meyerowitz Stories (New and Selected)

*The quality of the performances, the unobtrusive script, the sense that Noah Baumbach is so at home with this upscale New York art-world milieu: together these deliver the pleasurable, all-good viewing experience we once associated with Woody Allen*

52 Films of the Month

60 Films

84 Home Cinema

90 Books

**Sea of love: Dan Sickles and Antonio Santini's affectionate documentary portrait *Dina* explores the trials and tribulations of lovers Dina and Scott**

## Dina

USA 2017
Directors: Dan Sickles, Antonio Santini
Certificate 15 103m 15s

**Reviewed by Trevor Johnston**

Like a good few fortysomething women (and doubtless many men), Philadelphia native Dina Buno likes to watch TV reality shows. The Kardashians, she says, are her guilty pleasure, and she admits to a fascination with Caitlyn Jenner's transition to a new life as a woman. Most interestingly, perhaps, she also comments that she watches closely to see how such shows are made. In the moment, that seems like a throwaway comment, yet it's a thought worth holding on to. For as the subject of this observational documentary about her impending marriage to partner Scott, Dina is in some ways the star of her own reality show – one in which directors Dan Sickles and Antonio Santini cleave to the familiar narrative template of the odd-couple romance, while simultaneously adopting a distinctive formal approach that differentiates their second feature from the run of would-be transparent fly-on-the-wall documentaries.

Given that the subject matter is essentially a love story between two fragile individuals on the autistic spectrum, the material demands sensitive treatment to evade the pitfalls of condescension. You'd suppose the muted colour palette, locked-down camera and Academy frame ratio would introduce a layer of self-reflexivity, adding further distance between the viewer and the folks on screen. Counterintuitive, perhaps, but by flagging up the film's evidently constructed quality, the reverse turns out to be the case, since this invites an inquisitive audience to ponder how it's actually been made. What's revealed is a fruitful act of collaboration between Dina, her fiancé Scott and the filmmakers, one that proves to be absolutely in sync with the underlying positive messaging about empathy and inclusion.

Of course, this sort of quirky Sundance-approved doc always has a message of empathy and inclusion – it would be culturally untenable to offer anything else, after all – but the winner of 2017's Grand Jury Prize for Documentary is a genuinely thought-through piece and asks a bit more of its viewer than a well-meaning "Aww, bless" for its plucky participants. It's a film that gets into the nitty-gritty of who's telling this story and why, and it's likely to resonate with anyone who has ever felt slightly uneasy about independent cinema's seemingly unending stream of releases – both fictional and documentary – affording arthouse audiences an emotional wallow in the troubled lives of those

**Dina Buno**

less fortunate than themselves. Sickles refers to people like Dina and Scott as 'neurodiverse', differentiating them from the 'neurotypical' public at large, who may regard them as 'different' or 'special', and the achievement here is to prompt us to look again and rethink such well-meaning compartmentalisation.

All of which, rather unfairly, makes *Dina* sound like a bit of a duty, when it's anything but, boasting ample warmth and affection for its central duo, allowing us to laugh along with them and root for their future happiness together. The decision to do without narration, in-camera interviews or onscreen captions, simply letting the contours of their lives emerge from their daily business, proves effectively immersive by encouraging us to pay close attention. From the very first scene, when Dina is having a broken tooth repaired, it's clear that she's very bubbly and communicative, though subsequent moments – seeing her meet with a neurodiverse self-help group, hearing her on the phone to the disability benefits office or gleaning a backstory including a first husband

*All in all, this is a mighty achievement, and simply essential viewing for anyone keeping tabs on the state of the documentary artform*

lost to cancer and a subsequent brutal attack by an unstable boyfriend – fill out the picture of the myriad challenges facing her. That's before we even get to Scott. While Dina could possibly pass for neurotypical (though in fact suffering from post-traumatic stress, OCD and her own particular strain of autism), his slightly distant stare, ungainly physicality and obsession with local bus routes indicate someone whose Asperger's is more upfront. When he leaves his parents' house and moves in with Dina, it's clear that his anxious, self-isolating condition will make it difficult for him to express his evident affection for his bride-to-be in a physical fashion.

That question of whether or not Dina will find the affection and sexual fulfilment she craves from this gentlest of soulmates gives the film its ongoing narrative motor, foregrounds the whole issue of sexual rights for the neurodiverse and zeroes in on a certain amount of humour, as Dina whips out a surprise gift of *The Joy of Sex* and Scott in turn admits that he's no stranger to masturbation ("I started experimenting, then suddenly I was doing it all the time").

Some of this material plays on the comedy of embarrassment, such as a neurodiverse hen party with a stripping male cop and much good-natured pelvic thrusting. But even when we're treated to Dina's staggeringly out-of-sync disco dancing at the wedding reception, the film is always laughing with its participants rather than at them. The risk with this type of project is that their lives become commodified for the aesthetic benefit of the filmmakers, but you'll look in vain for any sense that Dina or Scott are uncomfortable with the attention or with being cajoled into performing at the directors' behest. Since the camera generally hangs back at a middle distance to contain the action within a static frame, there's little requirement for the movement or zooming that editorialising filmmakers might use to direct the eye to what's important in the shot. Instead, we're watching Dina and Scott doing what they do – seeing what they choose to share with us, even if that means a collaborative change of set-up in mid-scene.

Trust is a hard thing to quantify, but as viewers we know it when we see it: Gianfranco Rosi's patient filmography – from *El Sicario, Room 164* (2013) to *Fire at Sea* (2016) – is a case in point. Nowhere on screen are we informed that co-director Sickles's late father founded the self-help group that's crucial in Dina and Scott's lives, nor that the latter's passing away from a stroke left both her and the filmmaker coping with loss. Clearly, though, that long-term personal connection played a major part in the depth of mutual acceptance and comfort seen on screen. It allows the film to get away with parading a succession of truly ghastly interiors – the honeymoon hideaway has to be seen to be believed – that might otherwise have appeared to be highlighting the characters' naive lack of taste. More significantly, it gradually accumulates viewer involvement, eliding the boundaries of unwitting prejudice so that the story can deliver a dramatic *coup de théâtre*. Finally, it's only by venturing into the very darkest reaches of Dina's past that we come to a full appreciation of what a remarkable woman she is.

The term 'harrowing' barely does justice to the sequence in question, but it's crucial to our full appreciation of just what Dina has been through, and the fact that Scott, however much his own condition renders him sexually and emotionally inhibited, absolutely understands her extraordinary resilience. For anyone to have survived her life-threatening experiences and still have the inner strength to love again – to stand up and profess herself worthy of love – is a humbling thing to witness. That's the emotional keystone of the movie, bringing everything else into focus, though in many ways the defining formal contribution has come slightly earlier, in a daring cut from the kiss-the-bride moment at the couple's wedding reception in a restaurant function room to a shot from inside the venue's kitchen, offering a fleeting glance of Dina through a tiny window. It's jarring all right, but it exemplifies a telling strategy that the directors have used throughout, shooting from a distance (across the street from her apartment, say) to frame Dina and Scott as marginalised figures within the public realm – and metaphorically, underlining the outsider status of the neurodiverse within wider public consciousness.

Everything here is based on a fundamental level of trust and compassion, but what Sickles and Santini have done is to find a collaborative working method which enables Dina and Scott to share their story on their own terms, and then put it on screen with a level of nuance safeguarding the humour and emotion that emerge. Moreover, they've also taken a distinctive and effective formal approach, drawing the neurotypical audience towards changing their perceptions through the act of reading the film – without stealing the story from Dina and Scott, or turning them into aesthetic marionettes. All in all, a mighty achievement, and simply essential viewing for anyone keeping tabs on the state of the documentary artform.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Dan Sickles
Antonio Santini
**Director of Photography**
Adam Uhl
**Edited by**
Sofía Subercaseaux
**Sound**
Ben Nimkin
Mateo Liberatore

**Production Companies**
Moxie Pictures presents a Dan & Antonio production in association with Cinereach, Impact Partners, Killer Films
Made with the generous support of Impact Partners
**Executive Produced by**
Dan Levinson
Robert Fernandez
Christine Vachon
Stephanie Choate
Dan Cogan
Jenny Raskin

**In Colour [1.78:1]**

**Distributor**
Dogwoof

**Suburban Philadelphia, present day. This documentary follows the fortunes of 48-year-old Dina Buno, who lives on disability support due to various mental-health issues, some relating to her autism, others to the after-effects of a brutal knife attack by a psychotic ex-lover. Having lost her first husband to cancer, she is now engaged to Scott, a Walmart customer service assistant who has his own daily struggles with Asperger's. There is clear affection between the pair, but as he moves from his parents' home to her top-floor apartment and they are subsequently married, she becomes increasingly frustrated by his lack of sexual interest – which is caused by anxiety, self-esteem issues and difficulties with human contact. Nevertheless, Scott tells Dina that he is inspired by the resilience she has shown in surviving all the problems life has thrown at her. There are signs of an increasing intimacy that bodes well for their future together.**

# The Killing of a Sacred Deer

Ireland/United Kingdom/France/USA 2017
Director: Yorgos Lanthimos

**Reviewed by Jonathan Romney**

**Spoiler alert: this review reveals key plot details**

There is no deer in Yorgos Lanthimos's *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* – any more than there is an actual lobster in his *The Lobster* (2015) – but its presence, like that of the sacred, is at least implied. The game is a little clumsily given away, however, when protagonist Steven, a successful heart surgeon, visits his children's school in an attempt to work out which of the two of them is more deserving of being saved from certain death. One of his daughter Kim's virtues, the principal tells him, is that she wrote an excellent essay on the tragedy of Iphigenia.

In the myth, as made famous by Euripides and Racine, the sacred deer is killed by Agamemnon, causing offence to the goddess Artemis and necessitating the sacrifice of the king's daughter Iphigenia. So, despite being in the English language and shot substantially in Cincinnati, this is arguably the most Hellenic film yet from the man whose *Dogtooth* (2009) helped put Greek cinema back on the world map.

*The Killing of a Sacred Deer* follows the unlikely commercial success of *The Lobster*, Lanthimos's first English-language film, which saw him playing his characteristic games with words and surreal logic, and that assembled a starry international cast for a black comedy bearing echoes of theatrical absurdists from Ionesco to N.F. Simpson, not to mention touches of *Monty Python*. Again starring Colin Farrell, it ostensibly extends the same experiment; it uses English in a very similar way, especially in its deliberate, incantatory use of verbal banalities. But where *The Lobster* adopted an ostentatiously eccentric, almost farcical comic mode, *The Killing...* foregrounds its seriousness in the form of a ritualistic severity, and starkly confronts us with the theme of fleshly mortality from the very start. The pre-credits image, played to a solemn fanfare from Schubert's *Stabat Mater*, is a close-up of a human heart undergoing surgery. Presumably this is the surgery that, if he is truly to blame, a drunken Steven muffed earlier in his career – the cause of the sacrifice now demanded of him.

As is standard with Lanthimos, the film relies above all on discrepancy – notably between the timeless, transcendent status of the Iphigenia myth and the mundane concreteness of the contemporary setting into which that story is displaced (as suggested by a speech Steven gives about angioplasty, the film itself transplants an original narrative 'heart' into a new host body). This disjunction receives a particular spin here from Lanthimos's characteristically flat treatment of an extreme situation and the emotions surrounding it. The tone is set early on by a discussion about watches and the comparative virtues of metal and leather straps. The language is exaggeratedly prosaic throughout, as is the actors' affectless delivery; this acting style, since *Dogtooth*, has been recognisable as the quintessential mark of Lanthimos's direction, although even by the time of his third film *Alps* (2011) it seemed to be congealing into mannerism.

With its sporadic, abrupt moments of outré violence and sexuality, *The Lobster* invoked

**A death in the family: Nicole Kidman as Anna and Colin Farrell as her husband Steven**

extremes, but *The Killing...* goes further, and with less obviously humorous intent. There are indeed elements of comedy, not only in the verbal riffs but also in the relishably awkward scene in which Steven faces an earnest come-on from the mother of Martin, the teenage boy who has insinuated himself into the surgeon's life. (Alicia Silverstone plays the mother in a funny, rather touching return to the limelight: "I won't let you leave until you've tried my tart"). However, some of the odder absurdities – such as Martin's quasi-homoerotic curiosity about

**Kidman as ophthalmologist Anna**

Steven's body hair – seem incongruous, like a whimsical residue of Lanthimos's earlier mode.

But for the most part, the director and his regular co-writer Efthimis Filippou play it deadly serious. If *The Killing...* still feels at times like a black comedy executed with a ruthless poker face, it is nevertheless earnest in its intent to unsettle. The flouting of social decorum goes from Steven's wife Anna giving her husband's colleague a handjob in exchange for information, to a scene in which Steven confesses to Bob that he once gave his own father an orgasm. But the film goes much further in its use of images that seem to belong more to the horror genre than to art cinema (unless you're thinking of art cinema at the Haneke/von Trier end of the spectrum): young Bob bleeding from the eyes, or the climactic scene in which Steven places hoods over his family's heads, and his own, before taking blind shots at them, thus avoiding the necessity of choice.

Of course, such cold-blooded grand guignol sits directly in the lineage of Greek tragedy, and Lanthimos has simply made a film that lays bare the narrative and emotional extremity traditionally repressed by the formal restraint of classicism. Meanwhile *The Killing...* cinematically

reimagines the ritualistic resonance of tragedy by adopting a severe, grandiose style that is new for this director. The vast expanses of Steven and Anna's baronial-style home and of the hospital where he works suggest enclosed royal palaces; cinematographer Thimios Bakatakis exaggerates the coldly monumental scale of such spaces to evoke a hubristic realm of the materialistic and the rational, under threat from the merciless supernatural force of Martin's avenging will, as he demands that Steven makes drastic penance for the death of Martin's father on his operating table. The stakes of the drama – Steven can neither escape from nor compromise with destiny – are brought home by the adoption of a Kubrickian manner in the visuals, notably the long glides along symmetrically shot hospital corridors. A further echo of Kubrick comes in the use of modern compositions, including work by György Ligeti and Sofia Gubaidulina. The use of music is consistently disturbing, not least in the highlighting of an ominously thrumming percussive undercurrent or a repeated eerie whistling. Overall, Johnnie Burn's sound design is nerve-jangling.

That, however, is possibly the problem. Perhaps there should be a term for that strain of ruthlessly crafted auteur films that use both philosophical provocation and visceral effects to get under our skin: 'art rattlers', maybe, which would include much of Haneke and von Trier as well as Darren Aronofsky's preposterously forced *mother!* A drawback of such films might be that, after the impact of a first viewing, there may be less to engage with than one would hope. When I saw *The Killing...* in Cannes in May, I immediately wrote an enthusiastic review; but since then I have barely thought about it. Watching it again months later, I was disappointed to find that it doesn't reveal further depths, though it demonstrates how imposingly Lanthimos has transformed himself from a director of wildly offbeat yet minutely calibrated intimacy to an international provocateur confidently working on a quasi-operatic scale.

Where *The Killing...* does continue to impress is less in its narrative or its stylistic execution than in the precise direction of the acting, which in the case of Farrell – as an increasingly harassed patriarch, his emergent stress seeming to show in every hair of his salt-and-pepper beard – progresses from bemused containment to raging agony. Nicole Kidman gives a contained, knowing, crisply oblique performance that again shows – as she did in Jonathan Glazer's *Birth* (2004) – her command of veiled elusiveness. The more open performances by Raffey Cassidy and Sunny Suljic as the couple's children exude a candour that is all but moving – 'all but' because the overall tone so effectively distances us from direct emotional investment. The film's crowning achievement, however, is a cannily original piece of casting. As Martin, Barry Keoghan – recently seen in *Dunkirk* – is altogether unnerving: at once menacing, malign, faintly camp and oddly vulnerable, an implacable nemesis who nevertheless seems only too aware of his impersonal status as an instrument of destiny. S

*Lanthimos has transformed himself into an international provocateur confidently working on a quasi-operatic scale*

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Ed Guiney
Yorgos Lanthimos
**Written by**
Yorgos Lanthimos
Efthimis Filippou
**Director of Photography**
Thimios Bakatakis
**Edited by**
Yorgos Mavropsaridis
**Production Designer**
Jade Healy
**Sound Designer**
Johnnie Burn
**Costume Designer**
Nancy Steiner

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**Production Companies**
Film4 and New Sparta Films present in association with HanWay Films with the participation of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/the Irish Film Board an Element Pictures production in association with Limp With the support of the IFCIC Produced with the support of the State of Ohio Developed in association with Film4 With the support of the Creative Europe Programme - MEDIA of the European Union Produced by Sacred Deer Productions (UK) Limited
**Executive Producers**
Andrew Lowe
Daniel Battsek
Sam Lavender
David Kosse
Nicki Hattingh
Amit Pandya
Anne Sheehan
Peter Watson
Marie-Gabrielle Stewart
**Film Extracts**
*Groundhog Day* (1993)

### Cast
**Colin Farrell**
Steven Murphy
**Nicole Kidman**
Anna Murphy
**Barry Keoghan**
Martin
**Raffey Cassidy**
Kim Murphy
**Sunny Suljic**
Bob Murphy
**Alicia Silverstone**
Martin's mother
**Bill Camp**
Matthew Williams

**In Colour**
**[1.85:1]**

**Distributor**
Curzon Artificial Eye

**US, present day. Steven, a successful heart surgeon, is having meetings with Martin, a teenage boy with whom he has formed a mysterious friendship. He invites Martin to his suburban home to meet his family – ophthalmologist wife Anna and their children, daughter Kim, 15, and Bob, 12. Steven also visits Martin and his mother, who is attracted to Steven. Martin eventually informs Steven that it is time for him to pay for the death of his father, who died on Steven's operating table, and that Steven must choose which member of his own family will die; otherwise, Anna and the children will all die in a process of four stages of illness.**

**Bob succumbs to the first stage, paralysis, followed by an inability to eat; later will come bleeding from the eyes. Kim, who has formed a close emotional bond with Martin, collapses in turn. With the two children afflicted, Anna persuades Steven's colleague Matthew to tell her about Martin's father's death, in exchange for sexual favours. Steven kidnaps and brutalises Martin, but the boy remains implacable. Steven finally makes a painful choice: tying up his family members and placing a hood over his own head, he spins round and fires at them at random, finally killing Bob. Later, the surviving family members go to a diner, where they exchange looks with Martin.**

# Marjorie Prime

USA 2016
Director: Michael Almereyda
Certificate 12A 99m 6s

**Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton**

*Marjorie Prime* is a film of dialogues, one that largely keeps its major events off screen only to catch us up by having them recounted later. Characters die, decades pass, but save for a smattering of sparingly employed flashbacks, the action of the movie, such as it is, is confined almost exclusively to a few rooms in an airy beach house somewhere on the Long Island shore. Writer-director Michael Almereyda has been a festival-circuit mainstay since the late 1980s, during which time he's put together an eclectic filmography, including documentary and fiction works, that I've often found more interesting in theory than in execution. However, this is a judgement that I feel compelled to reconsider after *Marjorie Prime*, a movie that occasionally brushes the sublime. The films, of course, haven't changed – but maybe I have?

The untrustworthiness of memory is among the many ideas that Almereyda's film toys with. It is, in essence, a movie focused on storytelling, one that illustrates Joan Didion's maxim: "We tell ourselves stories in order to live." It begins maybe halfway through our still-young century, with a sit-down between an 85-year-old woman, Marjorie (Lois Smith), and a much younger man, Walter (Jon Hamm), who is apparently her husband. In fact, Walter is a 'Prime', a holographic representation of the long-deceased Walter as he looked in full health, purchased to keep the frail, sundowning Marjorie company, thanks to her daughter Tess (Geena Davis) and Tess's husband Jon (Tim Robbins). The family members feed the Prime information about the departed, and he in turn recites what he has learned to Marjorie, recalling to her the happy days of their marriage, which began with his proposal after a multiplex screening of *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997).

Or did it? Marjorie prefers it to have been *Casablanca* (1942) at a romantic old movie house, and so the story changes accordingly, and one of the film's flashbacks suggests that the first version wasn't altogether trustworthy either – we see a quite young Marjorie being proposed to by the then 20-years-older Walter in a moment of post-coital bliss-out, *My Best Friend's Wedding* serving as mere background noise to the scene. As we'll see, all kinds of things apply as time goes by.

Aside from the Prime and a brief appearance of a transparent, lightweight cell phone, Almereyda has not done a great deal to imagine the future. His is a 21st century in which the 20th century is readily detectable, where albums of faded photographs are kept and where, in what I take to be a touching show of optimism, there is still a North American intelligentsia who are halfway able to carry on conversations about William James.

Because it is a film about people using artificial intelligence for emotional succour and resolution, *Marjorie Prime* has inevitably garnered comparisons to Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013), a less interesting film in every regard, though a better point of reference might be David Lowery's recent *A Ghost Story*. Both films combine minimalist approach and maximalist ambition, and both are pointedly white – not in the default mode of so much entertainment, but specifically concerned with aspects of white American culture, particularly pertaining to attitudes about the idea of property. (There is something of this at work in Darren Aronofsky's *mother!* as well.) There are two non-white characters in Almereyda's movie. The first is played by Stephanie Andujar, who is of Puerto Rican descent, portraying a caretaker hired to look after Marjorie, her shortcomings in this role a source of continual agitation to Tess. The second is an adopted granddaughter of seemingly Asian heritage, who towards the film's close is looking after the ancient Jon – she is the end of the family line.

If this suggests the final eclipse of a long-fading line of Caucasian gentry, ceding its seat to a new generation, the scene that follows shortly thereafter, in which the collected AI avatars of the departed are gathered together in conversation, appears to occur after the eclipse of humanity itself. This conclusion, along with the presence of a Shiba Inu dog, strongly suggests that Almereyda may have some acquaintance with the new media artist Ian Cheng, whose work revolves around programming terrarium-like AI environments, and who uses the Shiba Inu as a kind of avatar.

I'm willing to make such an assumption because Almereyda has always been an erudite filmmaker whose diverse and myriad interests are reflected in his body of work, which has variously drawn on Shakespeare, surrealist literature, the photography of William Eggleston and, most recently, the controversial behavioural experiments of Stanley Milgram. *Marjorie Prime*, like the preceding *Experimenter* (2015) a mind-game movie, contains several cross-references, both overt and oblique. A significant role is played in the film by *The Gates*, the site-specific project that in 2005 festooned New York's Central Park with thousands of saffron-coloured nylon portals; it was the last project jointly undertaken by the married artistic team of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, whose collaboration was terminated by Jeanne-Claude's death in 2009 – this fact is very probably not coincidental. Almereyda is old friends with David Lynch, who appeared in and executive produced his 1994 film *Nadja*, and in a curious way his new movie is in dialogue with Lynch's *Twin Peaks: The Return* – both works are profoundly concerned with death, particularly with the act of cheating it, and both also frequently eschew action for its retelling. In the space between the two, deception slips in, and the film takes great pleasure in slights of the mind. It contains one striking interstitial image that appears almost unreal: an ocean, alive and shimmering like molten silver, spread out under a sky whose torpid clouds seem almost painted into place. This is not long after another of its flashbacks, which occurs in a room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art given over to a panoramic simulacrum painting of the gardens

**Prime of life: Jon Hamm as Walter, with Lois Smith as Marjorie in Michael Almereyda's intelligent sci-fi**

*Moving at a slow, carefully measured pace, 'Marjorie Prime' is gradually imbued with a sense of deepening feeling, arriving eventually at a place of real pathos*

at Versailles, a moment that can't help but recall the palace gardens of perhaps the most famous of films about the vagaries of memory, Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961).

Almereyda hasn't invented a new film grammar after the model of Resnais and cinematographer Sacha Vierny, but working with DP Sean Price Williams – responsible for a goodly portion of the more striking American independent movies of any given year, including Josh and Benny Safdie's new *Good Time* – he has found ways to lend visual dynamism to what is essentially a chamber drama (it's based on Jordan Harrison's Pulitzer-nominated play). The movie is highly sedentary, revolving largely around seated speakers, but it is brought alive by the acute attention to the different qualities of light coming through the gauzy curtains of the house's windows at various times of day and under a variety of climatic conditions, as well as the interplay between foreground and background space – the film gets touching effects from, for example, the play of soft reflections or a few neglected blue-and-white balloons visible through the doorway of a club restaurant, scattered among the empty tables.

Moving at a slow, carefully measured pace, *Marjorie Prime* is gradually imbued with a sense of deepening feeling, arriving eventually at a place of real pathos – no small feat for what is effectively a network narrative that keeps losing characters to death and replacing them with their imitations. On a conceptual level, the idea of a granddaughter being able to come face-to-face with the grandmother she never knew, or at least a reasonable facsimile of her, is a profoundly moving one, and Almereyda realises this very scene in his film with elegance – part of the charm of his movie is that, while allowing space for ambivalence towards the singularity, it doesn't succumb to easy technophobia. No small amount of the credit for putting this moment across goes to Davis and Robbins, both excellent here, as is Hamm, in his best post-*Mad Men* film outing, one that utilises his proven ability to play the role of the observer of life from a carefully maintained distance, though it muffles his capacity for empathy behind a kind of uncanny valley glaze. Top marks, however, must go to Smith, whose first sizeable screen role was in Elia Kazan's *East of Eden* in 1955, who with this film and a part in Greta Gerwig's upcoming *Lady Bird* is having something of a comeback year in 2017, and whose body of work allows one to see her in all the ages in between – for this business of recreating life is not so new after all.

Thanks for the memories: Tim Robbins as Jon with Geena Davis as Tess

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Michael Almereyda
Uri Singer
**Written for the Screen by**
Michael Almereyda
Based on the play by Jordan Harrison
**Director of Photography**
Sean Williams
**Editor**
Kathryn J. Schubert
**Production Designer**
Javiera Varas
**Music**
Mica Levi
**Supervising Sound Editor**
Rob Daly
**Costume Designer**
Kama K. Royz

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**Production Companies**
Passage Pictures presents
Filmed with the support of the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development
**Executive Producer**
Rogerio Ferezin
Luis Fragali
Jon Hamm
Adam Mirels
Per Melita
Tim Robbins
Isen Robbins
Aimee Schoof
**Film Extracts**
*Casablanca* (1942)
*The Gates* (2006)
*My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997)

### Cast

**Jon Hamm**
Walter
**Geena Davis**
Tess
**Lois Smith**
Marjorie
**Tim Robbins**
Jon
**Stephanie Andujar**
Julie
**Hana May Colley**
2nd generation Marjorie aged 10
**Hannah Gross**
young Marjorie
**India Kotis**
young Tess
**Leslie Lyles**
Mrs Salverson
**Cashus Muse**
bartender
**Azumi Tsutsui**
2nd generation Marjorie aged 30
**W.A. Walters**
old Jon

**In Colour [1.85:1]**

**Distributor**
Bulldog Film Distribution

**Long Island, New York, the middle of the 21st century. Marjorie, a former concert musician in her eighties, sits conversing with Walter, her younger husband, in their sunny beach house. Walter is in fact a 'Prime' – a hologram designed to keep the increasingly senile Marjorie company, entertaining her with recollections of her life with the real Walter, who died 15 years earlier. Marjorie's daughter Tess and her husband Jon argue over the implications of using a Prime and the trustworthiness of Marjorie's caretaker Julie, and discuss the unreliability of memory, which is evident in flashbacks contradicting the stories that Walter has been trained to repeat by Marjorie and family. Later, we see Tess conversing with a surprisingly cogent Marjorie; this manifestation is revealed to be a Prime as well, the real Marjorie having died. Later, Jon discusses Tess's suicide with a Prime version of his deceased wife, and introduces the holographic Tess to her granddaughter, adoptive child of their estranged daughter. In the future, the granddaughter looks after what appears to be a desiccated Jon, while in the living room of the beach house the various Primes – Walter, Tess and Jon – sit conversing.**

Tour de farce: (from left) Timothy Spall as Bill, Cillian Murphy as Tom, Emily Mortimer as Jinny and Patricia Clarkson as April in Sally Potter's biting comedy

## The Party

United Kingdom/Denmark 2017
Director: Sally Potter
Certificate 15 70m 54s

**Reviewed by Sophie Mayer**

Five minutes into Sally Potter's brisk, coruscatingly witty farce *The Party*, a disillusioned former activist named April arrives at a dinner party to celebrate her oldest friend's appointment as shadow health minister, and describes the new politics as "postmodern, post-post-feminist". It's a clue to the film's stakes: this is a comedy that bites because it is utterly and urgently of our moment. With the intelligence and generosity that are the hallmarks of Potter's writing and direction, it issues its challenge of big ideas through superb performances: with the verve of a musician, Patricia Clarkson, as April, wraps her lips around the many zingers she delivers. Updating a long-running British tradition of cloaking scathing political insights with social comedy (the party refers to both 'dinner' and 'Labour'), the film plays out like an extended version of the salon scene in Potter's *Orlando* (1992), in which Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift trade insults disguised as witticisms. Except that here, in the 21st century, it's the female characters who are making all the running.

April is the caustic Fool to calm, collected Janet (Kristin Scott Thomas), who opens the film negotiating her arrival in the political mainstream, taking calls from colleagues whose congratulations mask requests for favours. Busy in the kitchen being the modern woman who has and does it all, she balances her BlackBerry with fiddly filo pastry, recalling Hillary Clinton gritting her teeth to submit a cookie recipe to *Family Circle* magazine in 1992. Beyond her echo of Clinton's feminist claim to have put the "biggest crack in that glass ceiling", Janet, with her concern for public health, harks back to the 'spirit of '45' and the lineage of post-war social democracy. April, meanwhile, regards her second-wave feminism and civil-rights activism with conviction but without nostalgia, telling Janet: "Sisterhood is a very ageing concept, sweetheart."

Janet's husband Bill is a Christopher Hitchens-esque intellectual and libertarian whose personal health issues have led him to throw out both his socialist principles and his atheist convictions – "I'm asking myself an unanswerable question... even a metaphysical question... why me?" – by seeing a private consultant, much to Janet's dismay, and who appears to find faith in the spoutings of April's hippie-healer boyfriend Gottfried. ("Scratch an aromatherapist and you'll find a fascist," spits April.) The film makes hay with the casting of Bruno Ganz as the beatifically useless Gottfried, an energy worker given to clichés whose emptiness echoes the current crisis in European liberal democracy.

Representing more modern conflicts on the left spectrum are Tom (Cillian Murphy), an investment banker who gives a pointed speech about Bill and Janet's comfortable wealth (but also confesses, "I can't help anyone, I can't even help myself" – never a truer word spoken about turbo-capitalism), and his wife Marianne, a spin doctor who never appears but certainly seems to have everyone, particularly Bill and Janet, in a spin. Rounding out the

April Fool: Patricia Clarkson, with Bruno Ganz as Gottfried

party are Bill's academic colleague Martha (Cherry Jones), a verbally bullish feminist, and her pregnant younger wife Jinny (Emily Mortimer), a runner-up on *MasterChef* (one of the film's many nicely judged topical references) who – saving Janet's burning vol-au-vents – is both the beneficiary of glass-ceiling-shattering and struggling with expectations in a newly precarious work environment.

Like Ginger's godfathers Mark One and Mark Two in Potter's *Ginger & Rosa* (2012), Martha and Jinny – for all their differences – offer a queer counterpoint to the divisive bitterness between the heterosexual couples. In the film's most romantic moment, tough Martha confesses her vulnerability, telling Jinny: "I love you more than life itself." Their brilliantly played arguments not only touch on highly contemporary debates around same-sex marriage, the gender binary and emotional labour, but also call to mind – as their names suggest – Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

*The Party* taps into cinema's long and complex relationship with theatre with levity and dexterity, as we see not only in the reference to Albee's 1962 play (and Mike Nichols's 1966 film) but also in Marianne's turn as Godot. The film's title tips its hat to Mike Leigh's *Abigail's Party* and the *Play for Today* TV dramas that transferred the energy of live theatre to the living room in the 1970s and early 1980s. Like Alain Resnais in his Alan Ayckbourn adaptations, Potter finds an insistently cinematic language for and through the energy of farce, risking fisheye shots that satirise the deep seriousness with which the characters treat themselves. Beneath all the verbal brilliance are constant reminders of the chaotic nature of the body as it upsets logic and rationality, seen particularly in Murphy's wired performance as Tom and Mortimer's portrayal of the pregnant Jinny.

The effervescence of the performances is captured by director of photography Alexey Rodionov's trademark combination of classical compositions, which here locate the actors' bodies within the space of the house, and the gliding handheld shots developed for Potter's *Yes* (2004). Getting close to the characters as they move with a choreographed frenzy that blends the slapstick and the balletic, these shots generate a sense of the risk of live performing, and we remember that Potter herself has a background in performance, one of her projects being a 1980s avant-jazz group with Lindsay Cooper named The Marx Brothers – making evident even then her love of farce.

**Down in the groove: Timothy Spall as Bill**

Complementing its verbal wit and pointed use of slapstick, *The Party* is also a musical comedy, cueing us to listen with its opening track, a note-bending reworking of Hubert Parry's score for 'Jerusalem', co-arranged by Potter and frequent collaborator Fred Frith. The film's subsequent soundtrack, almost entirely diegetic, is DJ'd from Bill's record collection. A classical historian who wrote a book on the Roman Empire called *Reason, Roads and Religion*, Bill exhibits an appropriative taste for music that advertises his past hipness. The needle drop for the opening track, Bo Diddley's 'I'm a Man', is shot in fisheye, with Bill's face looming into the lens; while the track's assertion of masculinity is playfully parodied by the assortedly hopeless men in the film, it is Bill's whiteness that is most visible here, not least due to the crisp black-and-white photography. Bill follows Diddley with Sidney Bechet performing Cole Porter, Rubén González, Albert Ayler singing 'Summertime', Ibrahim Ferrer, John Coltrane and Ernest Ranglin – a cornucopia of iconic African-American, Latin American and Caribbean sounds. The personal and political thus entwine brilliantly on the soundtrack, calling in that which is missing from the whirl: the great swathe of history, of civil rights and anti-racist and postcolonial struggles; that which was once central to the left's project and has been lost.

*'The Party' taps into cinema's complex relationship with theatre with levity and dexterity, referencing Edward Albee, Godot and 'Abigail's Party'*

After the front door opens a second time, and we understand why Janet is wild of hair and eye, having almost quit her new job even before taking it up – and now questioning its value and that of her steady life's work giving speeches across the world about truth and reconciliation – the film cuts to black and one final track plays: legendary tango arranger Osvaldo Pugliese (also included on the soundtrack to Potter's 1997 film *The Tango Lesson*) performing Alfredo Bevilacqua's 'Emancipación', written to mark the centenary of the Republic of Chile. That is the promise symbolised by Marianne, historically the goddess of liberty, who has romanced (and/or betrayed) every character in the film. The final, dashing track suggests that the parties of the European left need to listen more closely to the music of postcolonial emancipation, to liberate themselves from – taking the titles of the colossal tomes so prominent on Janet and Bill's mantelpiece – *The Legacy of Rome*, *Man and Society* and *The West*. Through the twists and turns of its intimate revelations, *The Party* offers a delicious banquet of food for thought about how to be truly free.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Christopher Sheppard
**Producer**
Kurban Kassam
**Written by**
Sally Potter
**Cinematographer**
Alexey Rodionov
**Editors**
Anders Refn
Emilie Orsini
**Production Designer**
Carlos Conti
**Production Sound Mixer**
Jean-Paul Mugel
**Costume Designer**
Jane Petrie

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**Production Companies**
Great Point Media presents an Adventure Pictures production in association with Oxwich Media Limited, the Copenhagen Film Fund
A film by Sally Potter
Produced in association with
Oxwich Media Limited and Great Point Media
Developed in association with BBC Films
Developed with the support of The British Film Institute
**Executive Producers**
Jim Reeve
Robert Halmi Jr
John Giwa-Amu

**Cast**
**Patricia Clarkson**
April
**Bruno Ganz**
Gottfried
**Cherry Jones**
Martha
**Emily Mortimer**
Jinny
**Cillian Murphy**
Tom
**Kristin Scott Thomas**
Janet
**Timothy Spall**
Bill

**In Black and White [2.35:1]**

**Distributor**
Picturehouse Entertainment

**London, the present. An elegantly dishevelled woman opens her front door and raises a gun.**

**The story begins an hour or so earlier, as the woman, Janet, prepares a dinner in her kitchen while receiving calls congratulating her on her appointment as shadow health minister. Meanwhile her husband Bill, a lionised academic, plays his blues records in the sitting room. Their guests arrive to celebrate: first acid-tongued former activist April – Janet's oldest friend – and her energy-worker boyfriend Gottfried; then Bill's college roommate and now academic colleague Martha, followed by her younger wife, heavily pregnant chef Jinny; and finally coked-up banker Tom, arriving without his wife Marianne, a spin doctor who works with Janet. As the vol-au-vents burn, secrets and lies – mostly concerning the absent Marianne – spill among the friends, starting with a bombshell from Bill: he reveals that he has received a terminal diagnosis, and is having an affair. Both revelations lead to violent conflict with Janet – who initially says she will resign to care for him – and then with Tom, who reveals that he has arrived armed and intends to kill Bill. Despite Gottfried's attempts at mediation, personal and political battle lines are drawn. Martha and Jinny's relationship appears to be threatened by Martha's closeness to Bill, occasioning a showdown in the garden, while Janet, hiding out in the downstairs bathroom, seeks hard truths from April, leading to a final confrontation. Janet, having saved Bill's life and now armed with Tom's gun, answers the door to Marianne.**

# American Assassin

Director: Michael Cuesta
Certificate 18 111m 38s

**Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson**

"Patriotism exists to give people like us a higher calling," Michael Keaton's maverick CIA officer Stan Hurley lectures new recruit Mitch Rapp (Dylan O'Brien) during a peaceful lull on a mission in Rome. It's a rare moment of self-awareness in *American Assassin*, a blisteringly violent thriller in which hyper-aggressive US agents kill foreigners who have sinister agendas. Hurley and Rapp are part of a counter-terrorism operation in which brute force is king and 'intel' means scrolling broodily through a nuclear physicists watch list on an iPad. If patriotism gives them, and their enemies, their "higher calling", there's a risk it also gives *American Assassin* an air of seriousness it doesn't deserve.

The film is adapted from a novel in a series by Vince Flynn, about Rapp, a CIA operative fighting terrorism in a shadowy programme called Orion – the producers surely hope to build a Bourne-style franchise. In the books, Rapp wants to avenge his girlfriend's death in the 1988 Pan Am Lockerbie disaster. In the movie, she's killed during a terrorist massacre on a beach, which gives the film its bruising opening sequence, a cut-down version of *Saving Private Ryan*'s curtain-raiser, with deafening surround-sound gunfire and gory, spurting wounds. It's a taste of the gore to come in this bloodthirsty movie, essentially a series of bouts and one gruesome torture sequence strung together with drab talkie scenes and a feeble plot about missing Russian plutonium and a rogue Iranian general who wants to direct a nuclear bomb at Tel Aviv.

When his blood is up, as it frequently is, O'Brien's Rapp is a one-note character: a relentless murder-bot. In one disturbing scene, Hurley inserts images of the man responsible for Rapp's girlfriend's death into a VR exercise. Rapp robotically pumps blank bullets into his enemy's hologram until he collapses, despite receiving a searing electric shock each time he fires. As thuggish Hurley, Keaton drops banal aphorisms through gritted teeth ("This isn't a crusade," he says in Istanbul, prompting the opposite conclusion) and is charmlessly sexist to his female superior. His characterisation veers into grand guignol at the climax of the torture scene, with blood-stained mouth and bulging eyes.

Killer Rapp: Dylan O'Brien

Taylor Kitsch, as Ghost, an Orion operative turned mercenary, reaches for a charisma he can't attain, drawling "fun facts" about nuclear fallout to his Iranian allies. Playing the CIA deputy director who surveils the men in action, Sanaa Lathan can do little more than pepper her expository dialogue with knowing smirks.

On this evidence, director Michael Cuesta knows how to stage a fight scene, but not how to cut it short before it becomes preposterous. In fact, it's a skill in itself to make such a barrage of bullets and bruises seem banal. The highlight of the film remains the moment when Rapp escapes from a Turkish taxi in which he has been trapped by a pack of rabid dogs, proving briefly that not every scenario has a weaponised solution. Or just that the filmmakers are more squeamish about canine flesh than human tissue.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Lorenzo di Bonaventura
Nick Wechsler
**Screenplay**
Stephen Schiff
Michael Finch
Edward Zwick
Marshall Herskovitz
Based on the novel
by Vince Flynn
**Director of Photography**
Enrique Chediak
**Film Editor**
Conrad Buff
**Production Designer**
Andrew Laws
**Music**
Steven Price
**Costume Designer**
Anna Sheppard
**Production Companies**
CBS Films and Lionsgate Films present a Lorenzo di Bonaventura/Nick Wechsler production
A Michael Cuesta film
**Executive Producer**
Daniel M. Stillman

**Cast**
**Dylan O'Brien**
Mitch Rapp
**Michael Keaton**
Stan Hurley
**Sanaa Lathan**
Irene Kennedy
**Shiva Negar**
Annika
**David Suchet**
Stansfield
**Navid Negahban**
Behurz
**Scott Adkins**
Victor
**Taylor Kitsch**
Ghost
**Joseph Long**
Rostami

**In Colour**
**[2.35:1]**

**Distributor**
Lionsgate UK

**Present day. After his girlfriend is murdered in a terrorist attack at a holiday resort, Mitch Rapp swears vengeance on the perpetrators. He poses as an aspiring jihadi on chatrooms, until he is summoned to Tripoli for a face-to-face meeting with the man responsible for his girlfriend's death. The CIA, which has been watching Rapp, swoops in, killing all the terrorists before Rapp can take his revenge. CIA deputy director Irene Kennedy recruits Rapp for Orion, a semi-official counter-terrorism programme led by maverick officer Stan Hurley. Although Rapp is motivated by personal revenge, he is selected for a mission in Istanbul. A large quantity of Russian plutonium is missing and the CIA suspects that it has been bought by rogue members of the Iranian military, including a general named Rostami. In Istanbul, the initial plan fails, but Rapp defies orders and murders an arms dealer. He and his group follow the trail to Rome, where they discover that a wayward former Orion operative, Ghost, is involved. Ghost captures Hurley and tortures him, revealing that he plans to target Americans with a nuclear bomb. Rapp chases Ghost to a speedboat, where they fight. Rapp kills Ghost, but Kennedy tells him that the bomb is on the boat and that he must throw it into the ocean to save the US naval fleet nearby. Rapp does so and the bomb explodes, causing only limited damage. Later, Irene and Hurley meet up, unaware of Rapp's whereabouts. He is in Dubai, following Rostami.**

# American Made

Director: Doug Liman
Certificate 15 115m 0s

**Reviewed by Tim Hayes**

*American Made* opens with President Jimmy Carter's 'Malaise' speech of July 1979 and ends in 1985 with a bright spark at the CIA dreaming up what will become the Iran-Contra affair, so the trajectory of American exceptionalism during the early stewardship of Ronald Reagan is on the film's mind. But what it makes of a skilled working man going along for the ride and being all he can be is hard to judge. Based on real events, it has Barry Seal (Tom Cruise) starting as a TWA pilot who isn't above smuggling Cuban cigars, then assisting the CIA with its agenda in Central America, and eventually helping to deliver Pablo Escobar's drugs into the US while keeping the Medellín cartel supplied with guns. By any stretch this makes a measurable contribution to the world's ills, but Doug Liman's film shows nothing of these matters and looks instead at the wear and tear on the family life of an American entrepreneur taking low blows from fate and foreigners.

Liman, working with cinematographer César Charlone, who shot *City of God* (2002) in similarly scuzzy and abrasive style, scoots through events at a lick rapid enough to leave many characters short of colour, but especially the critical figure of Seal's wife Lucy (Sarah Wright). Her easy accommodation of Seal's wayward path is too vague to pin down as acquiescence or greed or anything clear in between, and the audience has no chance to see him as she does. Moreover, the darker ambiguities of human nature have never been Cruise's strongest suit; friction between the actor's natural but non-electrifying charisma and the charitable interpretation that Seal is a bit of a shit is a tension the film skirts around, and for the most part avoids acknowledging at all.

Some of the film, meanwhile, would like to raise a laugh, which in the absence of actual satire is likely to sound fairly hollow. It eventually enters Oliver Stone territory, with walk-ons from various real-life authority figures and dim bulbs – one of which, Connor Trinneer's 30 seconds as George W. Bush, catches the bland bonhomie

Frequent flier: Tom Cruise

and intellectual shallows that lie in America's future, delivering the film's major piece of actual commentary almost despite itself. Most of the wit is altogether broader than that, in the vein of Seal riding a child-size bike while liberally dusted with white powder, a visual in search of the joke that spawned it. A film that's about the morals of the drug trade and the character of a man at the heart of it, but which stays mild and sketchy on both the character and the morals, is likely to feel pretty dilute, if not actively negligent. It also runs the risk of being non-committal about the caustic absurdities of covert government shenanigans foreign and domestic, just as the urgent need to find ways of holding today's political class to account on this and every other matter becomes pressing. Either damn all these buffoons or justify them, but one or the other.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Brian Grazer
Brian Oliver
Doug Davison
Kim Roth
Ray Angelic
Tyler Thompson
**Written by**
Gary Spinelli
**Director of Photography**
César Charlone
**Editor**
Andrew Mondshein
**Production Designer**
Dan Weil
**Music**
Christophe Beck
**Costume Designer**
Jenny Gering

**Production Companies**
Universal Pictures and Cross Creek Pictures present in association with Imagine Entertainment a Brian Grazer production in association with Vendian Entertainment, Quadrant Pictures and Hercules Film Fund
A Doug Liman film
**Executive Producer**
Paris Latsis
Terry Dougas
Brandt Andersen
Eric Greenfeld
Michael Finley
Michael Bassick
Ray Chen

### Cast
**Tom Cruise**
Barry Seal
**Domhnall Gleeson**
Monty Schafer
**Sarah Wright Olsen**
Lucy Seal
**E. Roger Mitchell**
Craig McCall
**Jesse Plemons**
Sheriff Downing
**Lola Kirke**
Judy Downing
**Alejandro Edda**
Jorge Ochoa
**Benito Martinez**
James Rangel
**Mauricio Mejía**
Pablo Escobar
**Caleb Landry Jones**
JB
**Jayma Mays**
Dana Sibota
**Jayson Warner Smith**
Bill Cooper
**Mark McCullough**
Pete
**Robert Kinter**
**Stanton Kowalychk**
Snowbird team
**Emilio Sierra**
Hector

**Dolby Digital**
**In Colour**
**[1.85:1]**

**Distributor**
Universal Pictures International
UK & Eire

**Louisiana, 1979. Barry Seal, a TWA pilot with a sideline smuggling Cuban cigars into the US, is coerced by CIA agent Schafer into flying a spy plane over Nicaragua, as part of covert support for anti-communist forces. Seal proves so good at this task that he becomes a CIA courier to Manuel Noriega in Panama, and also encounters the Medellín cartel in Colombia, which is smuggling drugs into the US. Seal relocates to Mena, Arkansas, with his wife Lucy and family. He settles into a profitable routine of taking CIA guns meant for the Nicaraguan Contras to the Colombian cartel instead, and bringing its cocaine back into America, while being paid by all sides. The flow of money into Mena attracts the attention of the FBI. Lucy's brother JB joins the operation, but is arrested, and then killed by agents of the cartel to prevent him talking. Schafer realises Seal's deception and erases all connections to the CIA. Seal is arrested and compelled by the US government to take photographs implicating the Colombian cartel in America's drug epidemic. The pictures become public, revealing Seal's identity. Knowing that he will be murdered as a result, Seal sends his family away and attempts to evade the cartel's killers. He records his story on VHS tapes, before being shot dead. Schafer decides to support the Contras via arms sales to Iran instead.**

# The Ballad of Shirley Collins

United Kingdom 2017
Directors: Rob Curry, Tim Plester
Certificate 12A 94m 18s

**Reviewed by Frances Morgan**

In 1978, Shirley Collins found herself unable to sing. She was performing in an adaptation of *Lark Rise to Candleford* at the National Theatre when her husband, the folk musician Ashley Hutchings – who was also the show's musical director – abruptly ended their relationship. Collins's voice quite literally deserted her, and she retired from performing the traditional songs that had been central to her life for decades.

This is the dramatic nadir from which Rob Curry and Tim Plester's film narrates Collins's journey back into singing, culminating in the recording of a new album, *Lodestar*, released last year when Collins was 81 years old. This trajectory of success, misfortune, obscurity and rediscovery is familiar to viewers of music documentaries such as *Searching for Sugar Man* (Malik Bendjelloul, 2012). But, as in the case of Sixto Rodriguez in that film, Collins's story is more complicated than that, and it is to the directors' credit that for the most part they allow her to tell it herself.

Collins is a born storyteller with a forensic memory and a fierce intelligence, which won't be news to her fans. While the film gives little sense of her current public profile, she has spent much of the past decade or so giving hugely popular lectures about English folk music and her journeys with ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax through the Southern states of the US in 1959, which she detailed in her 2005 book *America over the Water*. Collins's memories of her American travels are evoked here with a palimpsest-like arrangement of real and re-enacted material:

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Paul Williams
Rob Curry
Tim Plester
**Director of Photography**
Richard Mitchell
**Film Editors**
Rob Curry
Tim Plester
**Sound Recordists**
Ludovic Lasserre
Justin Smith
Andy Hewitson
Andrew Rowe
Nadine Richardson
Marco Lavarone

©Fifth Column Films
**Production Companies**
Burning Bridges & Fire Films present in association with Miles of Smiles a Fifth Column Films production
A documentary film by Rob Curry & Tim Plester
Made with the kind support of The Wellcome Trust, The National Folk Music Fund (in memory of Ursula Vaughan Williams), The Adderbury Cine Club and our wonderful Kickstarter crowd
**Executive Producer**
James Nicholls

### Cast
*16mm Reconstruction Cast*
**Lotti Maddox**
young Shirley
**Tassos Stevens**
Alan Lomax
**Henry Miller**
Bert Lloyd
**Janet Rawson**
Texas Gladden
**Stephen Wrigley**
Hobart Smith
**Ian Hartley**
Preston Smith
**George Depaul**
Sid Hemphill
**Thomas Joseph**
Lucius Smith
**Suzann McLean**
Sidney Carter
**Chelsea Omoogun**
Ruby Hemphill
**Jaden Omoogun**
Bobby Hemphill
**Glyn Lewis**
Horton Barker

narration by
**Hannah Arterton**

**In Colour**
**[1.85:1]**

**Distributor**
Burning Bridges

**A portrait of the English folk singer and song collector Shirley Collins, who was born in Hastings, East Sussex, in 1935. Centred around the recording of a new album, 'Lodestar' – released in 2016, 38 years after her previous one – the film uses footage from the 'Lodestar' sessions, interviews, archive material and reconstructions to build a picture of Collins's life and career, including her visits to the US with song collector and ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax.**

tape recordings, Collins's letters home read in voiceover by Hannah Arterton and reconstructed footage in which another actor, Lotti Maddox, plays a young Collins, enthusiastically working Lomax's reel-to-reel on Mississippi porches. The credits note that these sequences – one of which features Plester – were filmed in Sussex, in a telescoping of time and place that hints at the tricksy, layered nature of memory. Recordings and recollections from America are heard over modern-day footage of brewing and farming on the Sussex Downs, connecting rural communities half a century and thousands of miles apart.

The Sussex countryside and Collins's relationship to it are at the heart of the film. Plester and Curry – and very likely the singer herself – are far more interested in this than they are in Collins's position within the British folk revival of the 1950s and 60s, which is refreshing as well as true to her position as something of an outlier on that scene. But it's also in keeping with the theme of English identity that the directors explored in *Way of the Morris* (2010), in which Plester went in search of the roots of morris dancing. Part personal journey and part meditation on the revival of traditional cultural practices, *Way of the Morris* leaned heavily on an idea of a semi-mystical, presumed-lost but occasionally found 'Albion', and traces of this also animate *The Ballad of Shirley Collins*. The film is bookended with footage of the Bonfire Night parade that each November lights up Lewes, where Collins now lives, with burning tar barrels and crosses (symbolising the parade's anti-Catholic origins); we also visit the Jack in the Green festival in Hastings. Collins's friend and long-time supporter David Tibet, of the apocalyptically inclined folk group Current 93, is introduced as a "torch-bearer"; the camera glances briefly at a C93 rarities compilation with a sigil-like cover design.

Yet Collins seems quite resolutely unmystical, instead asserting folk music's historical role as the songs of "despised, neglected, abused people"; she is also the only person in the film to address race in any way, describing with candour her discomfort at the racial tensions she encountered in the Southern US and her own position as an outsider there. I would have liked more from her on the question of English identity, for I think she avoids easy answers far more than some of her younger interlocutors do.

At her peak, Collins says, she captured "the essence of English song" – "I sung and understood it better than anyone else," she remarks, quite unselfconsciously. This is not a boast about virtuosity, but an acknowledgement of her ability to let the song sing through her, unadorned. We hear that wonderful voice over wintry shots of the Downs, which suits its chilly clarity. It's therefore moving to see the older Collins wrestling with her confidence as she records her new album, an experience that clearly leads her to address her past more viscerally than writing and lecturing about it have done. The intimacy of cinematographer Richard Mitchell's camera, often focused tightly on small gestures and domestic details, allows the viewer to share Collins's ambivalence about making music in public again, as well as her pleasure in doing so.

# Borg vs McEnroe

Sweden/Denmark/Czech Republic/Finland 2017
Director: Janus Metz
Certificate 15 107m 35s

**Reviewed by Jason Anderson**

At its best, Danish director Janus Metz's film about the most famous rivalry in the history of professional tennis demonstrates nearly as much dexterity and ability as its two subjects. It may also be just as much of a contradiction: though an often perceptive double portrait that makes astute points on matters of male bonding and competition as well as fame's isolating effects, it's delivered with all the subtlety of an Andy Roddick overhead smash.

The thematic thrust of *Borg vs McEnroe* is flagged in bold and underline at every juncture, from the opening epigraph by Andre Agassi, which includes his claim that "every match is a life in miniature", through the training and match scenes accompanied by unseen commentators yammering about the epic battle between "the Ice-Borg and the Superbrat", to the inevitable round of archival photos and what-it-all-meant postscripts before the end credits. When combined with aggressively cut sports-movie montages full of grimace-faced men smacking balls in slow motion, it ought to be obnoxious. Yet since the players' original match was very much presented in similarly exaggerated terms – albeit sometimes in the more measured tone preferred by iconic BBC presenter Dan Maskell – Metz's recreation will feel true to the memories of tennis fans who lived through the avalanche of hype. Even for those with no interest in the mysteries of topspin, this was high drama of the most potent variety, a battle for supremacy between two men whose apparently contrasting sensibilities caused male spectators to ask themselves, as one commentator claims here: "Who am I? The gentleman or the rebel?"

Of course, the film's primary goal is to demolish that bogus binary and show how much its subjects shared at their cores. Though Metz repeatedly circles back to the grainy, home-movie image of Björn Borg as a smiling boy (played by Borg's son Leo) practising against a garage door, nearly every other scene of the player's history and private life emphasises the point that the supposedly icy Swede was every bit as angry as his more obviously hot-headed American rival. In a beautifully measured exchange between Stellan Skarsgård's coach Lennart Bergelin and Marcus Mossberg as the teenaged Borg, the older man acknowledges his young charge's "rage, fear and panic", before telling him he must "load it into every stroke". A Swedish actor whose physical resemblance to Borg in his prime is astonishing, Sverrir Gudnason gives the later scenes a seething tension, the player's every movement and gesture suggesting a ceaseless campaign to contain the storm inside.

As for the other player in the film's title, Metz invites viewers to enjoy the Superbrat's tantrums at a safe distance, as Shia LaBeouf's McEnroe rails against noisy pigeons, idiot judges and abusive spectators. But the film generally opts for a more melancholy view, presenting him as a lonely, nervous youngster who longs for his father's approval and holes up in his hotel room when he leaves the court, filling one wall with the Wimbledon ladder in scrawls of black marker.

While LaBeouf and Gudnason are convincing in Borg and McEnroe's exhilarating match sequences (the recreation of their climactic final runs nearly 20 minutes), both actors are most impressive in the film's least explosive moments. In the most affecting of these, the two men recognise themselves in each other, or possibly the selves they want to be. While partying with a poodle-haired Vitas Gerulaitis (a terrific Robert Emms of *Happy Valley*), McEnroe speaks of the man he's determined to beat with none of the cockiness expected of an ambitious upstart, only awe and reverence. Meanwhile Borg, scrutinising a McEnroe match on TV, explains to his disbelieving fiancée Mariana Simionescu (Tuva Novotny) how his rival's shows of temper are his unconventional (and possibly unconscious) means of controlling the game. Metz lends a sly humour to his portrayal of this burgeoning bromance in their first pre-match encounter: when Borg gives his opponent a shy half-smile, a terrified McEnroe looks away with a painfully flummoxed expression.

Films about sports events have no lack of potential pitfalls, but Metz and screenwriter Ronnie Sandahl wisely take the same tack that Ryan Coogler did with *Creed* (2015). Rather than avoid the clichés, they lean hard into them with a brisk efficiency and an infectious bravado. Metz also achieves an effective balance between the more urgent and unrestrained camera style he has preferred in his earlier films (notably the Cannes prizewinning documentary *Armadillo*) with a more strictly composed look that emphasises the tennis court's geometric simplicity. In another smart touch, the palette departs from the implausibly pristine greens of most tennis films for the grubby browns more typical of Wimbledon's later rounds.

And like the cacophony of announcers spouting clichés on the film's soundtrack, *Borg vs McEnroe*'s non-linear structure and onscreen text may initially seem gimmicky but they ultimately help Metz's film to maintain its fierce momentum and its clear – if over-emphasised – set of objectives.

Racket science: Shia LaBeouf, Sverrir Gudnason

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Jon Nohrstedt
Fredrik Wikström
Nicastro
**Written by**
Ronnie Sandahl
**Director of Photography**
Niels Thastum
**Edited by**
Per Sandholdt
Per K. Kirkegaard
**Production Designer**
Lina Nordqvist
**Composers**
Jonas Struck
Vladislav Delay
Jon Ekstrand
Carl-Johan Sevedag
**Sound Design**
Rasmus Winther Jensen
Heikki Kossi
**Costume Designer**
Kicki Ilander

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**Production Companies**
SF Studios presents
in co-production with
Film i Väst, Nordisk Film, SVT - Sveriges Television, Sirena Film, SF Studios Production ApS and Yellow Film & TV
With production support from the Swedish Film Institute, Nordisk Film & TV Fond, the Danish Film Institute, the Finnish Film Foundation, DR and YLE
Co-funded by Creative Europe MEDIA
A film by Janus Metz
Supported by the Czech Republic through the State Cinematography Fund
**Executive Producer**
Tim King

### Cast

**Sverrir Gudnason**
Björn Borg
**Shia LaBeouf**
John McEnroe
**Stellan Skarsgård**
Lennart Bergelin
**Tuva Novotny**
Mariana Simionescu
**Leo Borg**
young Borg age 9-13
**Marcus Mossberg**
young Borg age 15+
**Jackson Gann**
young McEnroe
**Scott Arthur**
Peter Fleming
**Ian Blackman**
John McEnroe Sr
**Robert Emms**
Vitas Gerulaitis
**David Bamber**
George Barnes
**Mats Blomgren**
Rune Borg
**Julia Marko Nord**
Margareta Borg
**Jane Perry**
Kay McEnroe

**In Colour**
**[2.35:1]**
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**
Curzon Artificial Eye

Swedish theatrical title
**Borg**

**Monaco, 1980. The 24-year-old Swedish tennis champion Björn Borg prepares for Wimbledon, where he hopes to achieve a fifth consecutive win in the men's singles. Borg's rivalry with John McEnroe, the 21-year-old American whose brash on-court behaviour contrasts with the Swede's controlled manner, fuels a media circus in the run-up to the tournament.**

**Though the publicity emphasises the men's differences, flashbacks to their early lives reveal the traits and drive they share. Borg's coach Lennart Bergelin conditions the emotionally turbulent teenager to channel his rage into his game. Scenes of the young McEnroe show his will to succeed as an effort to meet the expectations of his parents.**

**At Wimbledon, Borg's play in the opening rounds is erratic, and he is sullen and moody in private moments with Bergelin and fiancée Mariana Simionescu. Meanwhile McEnroe's ruthless will to win jeopardises his friendship with fellow American Peter Fleming. Both players display their prowess and tenacity in a dramatic final. Borg wins but McEnroe impresses spectators by controlling his temper. Leaving London, the players are warm to each other at the airport.**

**A postscript describes the men's close friendship in the years after McEnroe beat Borg in their 1981 Wimbledon rematch.**

# Breathe

United Kingdom/Switzerland 2017
Director: Andy Serkis
Certificate 12A 117m 22s

**Reviewed by Kate Stables**

"The mercy of it is, they don't last," says the brisk British ambassador in Nairobi to the shattered and pregnant Diana, whose young husband has just been paralysed by polio. It's the first of many reminders in this handsome, consciously uplifting biopic of disability campaigner Robin Cavendish of the pitying objectification of the disabled that once prevailed.

A defiantly cheerful period upper-class love story, the film to begin with presents its 1950s romance (Kenyan biplanes, hiking, dancing to Bing Crosby's 'True Love' at sunset) as unclouded bliss. Once Robin (a wry Andrew Garfield) becomes paralysed from the neck down and respirator-dependent, there's more grit in the mix, as Diana defies the medical authorities to prise her suicidal husband from the strictly controlled polio ward to which he is condemned and make a life with their infant son.

First-time director Andy Serkis, who portrayed polio survivor Ian Dury in 2010's *Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll*, has created a warm, respectful adaptation of Robin's life story (son Jonathan Cavendish is the film's producer). Leaving his inner life unexamined, it's thematically and visually straightforward, an unabashed celebration of Robin's bravery, Diana's determination and their friends' unflagging help. Stacked with charming supporting turns from Hugh Bonneville, Stephen Mangan and Tom Hollander (who is playful as a pair of twins), it's a likeable piece – one that ignores the 'imprisoned body and roving mind' trope seen in biopics of the more famous Stephen Hawking and Jean-Dominique Bauby to concentrate on Robin's overwhelming wish: "I don't want to just survive. I want to truly live."

Films such as *My Left Foot* (1989), *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007) and *The Theory of Everything* (2014) explored the struggle to do important work despite disability. *Breathe* finds the creativity in defying medical orthodoxy, in making an independent, well-lived life and in sharing the breakthroughs. As Robin commissions a wheeled respirator chair and specially adapted van, Serkis shows the risk and exhilaration of the handcrafted-kit-and-willpower innovations; expanding the portrayal of disability on film, it eschews the glamorised suicide-wish of films like *Me Before You* (2016) for a full-throated appreciation of boozy parties, fatherhood and rattling down country lanes.

In its third act, the film's scope widens, as the Cavendishes raise funds to equip other polio victims with 'the Cavendish chair'. Serkis keeps the mood upbeat in, for example, the couple's 'plucky or pitiful?' debate before they pitch to Diana Rigg's irritable dowager for funding. The steely, well-bred pluck that has become Claire Foy's stock-in-trade makes Diana register strongly in these scenes. She's helped by William Nicholson's affectionate, old-school script, replete with the Cavendishes' officer-class confidence, their gameness, playful intimacy and (importantly) their continued sexual bond. Yet it also delivers the odd unexpected punch. The shock of a German clinic's state-of-the-art multiple-user iron lung, with polio patients stacked for the doctors' convenience, prompts Robin's heartfelt plea for inclusion and independence at a conference where he is the only disabled attendee. Reminiscent of the grandstanding speech in *The Theory of Everything*, it feels moving, yet a little over-arranged.

Garfield's performance is undoubtedly impressive, his croakily posh drawl and expressive eyes fuelling everything from a despairing spit on a patronising priest to a near-death experience. But, rather as 'whitewashing' has become less tenable on screen, one can't help wondering how long the realities of film financing will keep disabled actors from representing their community's stories in major movies.

True love: Claire Foy, Andrew Garfield

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Jonathan Cavendish
**Screenplay**
William Nicholson
**Director of Photography**
Robert Richardson
**Editor**
Masahiro Hirakubo
**Production Designer**
James Merifield
**Composer**
Nitin Sawhney
**Production Sound Mixer**
Danny Hambrook
**Costume Designer**
Charlotte Walter

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**Production Companies**
Silver Reel, BBC Films and BFI present in association with Embankment Films an Imaginarium production
An Imaginarium production on behalf of Silver Reel, BBC Films and BFI
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund
**Executive Producers**
Phil Robertson
Christine Langan
Joe Oppenheimer
Tim Haslam
Hugo Grumbar
Claudia Bluemhuber
Ian Hutchinson
Florian Dargel
Irene Gall
James Spring
Larry Taube
Natascha Wharton

**Cast**
**Andrew Garfield**
Robin Cavendish
**Claire Foy**
Diana Cavendish
**Tom Hollander**
Bloggs Blacker/ David Blacker
**Stephen Mangan**
Dr Clement Aitken
**Jonathan Hyde**
Dr Entwistle
**Edward Speleers**
Colin Campbell
**Dean-Charles Chapman**
Jonathan aged 22
**Penny Downie**
Tid
**David Wilmot**
Paddy
**Amit Shah**
Dr Khan
**Ben Lloyd-Hughes**
Dr Don McQueen
**Miranda Raison**
Mary Dawney
**Sylvester Groth**
Dr Erik Langdorf
**Camilla Rutherford**
Katherine Robertson
**Steven O'Donnell**
Harry Tennyson
**Diana Rigg**
Lady Neville
**Hugh Bonneville**
Teddy Hall
**Harry Marcus**
Jonathan aged 10

**In Colour [2.76:1]**

**Distributor**
STX Entertainment

**Kenya, 1959. Tea broker Robin Cavendish and his new bride Diana find their idyllic life thrown into turmoil when he is paralysed by polio. Pregnant Diana is told that his life expectancy is very short. Confined to a polio ward back in England, Robin asks to die. Defying medical advice, Diana smuggles him home with his respirator to live with their toddler Jonathan. Robin nearly dies when the dog unplugs the respirator. In 1962, Robin's friend Teddy makes him a wheelchair with a built-in respirator. Robin enjoys family life, hosts parties and travels with Diana and Jonathan in an adapted van. When they are stranded in Spain with a broken respirator, they keep Robin alive with a hand pump. Teddy flies in to mend the respirator. Robin is persuaded to fundraise so that many more adapted wheelchairs can be made. Horrified by a German clinic where polio patients are stacked in iron lungs, Robin appears at a conference and makes a passionate plea for freedom and social inclusion for the disabled.**

**Many years later, Robin's health begins to decline and he tells Diana that he wishes to end his life. After a farewell party, and pledging his love for Diana and Jonathan, he is helped to die.**

# Call Me by Your Name

Director: Luca Guadagnino
Certificate 15 131m 54s

See Feature on page 32

**Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley**

Many critics were enamoured of Luca Guadagnino's last two features, *I Am Love* (2009) and *A Bigger Splash* (2015), both of which set Tilda Swinton's uniquely self-enclosed sensuality against striking Italian backdrops (Milan and San Remo in the former, the Sicilian coast in the latter). I found them beautiful yet bloodless, lacking a certain warmth. *Call Me by Your Name*, on the other hand, radiates heat. It is a lush, lusty affair, all pounding hearts and blazing loins. Guadagnino has shown a fondness for imbuing the gastronomic with metaphorical significance; in his fifth feature he gives us splattered egg yolks and blood dripping on to lamb chops, and a repeated motif of ripening fruit, culminating in a sex scene involving peaches that will no doubt become notorious. Not since *American Pie* (1999) has fruit been so thoroughly defiled.

The peach scene is lifted almost exactly from the 2007 novel by André Aciman, an American scholar specialising in the work of Proust. It is a story of adolescent sexual awakening set in the well-appointed home of an academic in mid-1980s Italy. Elio is the 17-year-old only child of American professor Perlman (Michael Stuhlbarg) and his beautiful, cosmopolitan wife (Amira Casar). Until now he has been mostly heterosexual and has an ongoing flirtation with childhood friend Marzia. But when 24-year-old Oliver, the latest in a series of visiting postdocs to spend a summer at the villa, usurps Elio's bedroom, he also seizes Marzia's place in Elio's sexual fantasies. We first glimpse Oliver with Elio from an upper window; as he mounts the staircase, Marzia casually kisses him, as if passing on the mantle.

Oliver (Armie Hammer, perfectly cast) is the aggressively handsome embodiment of all things American: an academic who speaks in abbreviations though he is clearly extremely articulate, as demonstrated by a grandstanding monologue on the etymology of the word 'apricot'. Elio is puppyish, wiry rather than chiselled, more naive than the older man but also sensitive and reckless. Timothée Chalamet is sensational in the role: fierce and articulate, his hooded eyes flickering with secret thoughts. He looks a little like Melvil Poupaud or Louis Garrel (whose sister Esther coincidentally stars as Marzia), but he has a purposefulness they lack.

For much of the film little happens, and we watch Elio and Oliver move in circles while seemingly no closer to making a move. One feels the influence of Eric Rohmer (Aciman is an admirer) and James Ivory (the film's screenwriter), that great chronicler of repressed desire. The tone is languorous but the pace restless. Scenes are short and cuts abrupt. It's not clear whether Elio wants to be Oliver – borrowing his swimsuits, copying the Star of David he wears around his neck – or have him. Despite their physical differences, the would-be lovers seem strangely fungible as they trade bedrooms, clothes and names.

Of course, *Call Me by Your Name* is a queer film, albeit one that has more in common with the work of André Téchiné than Barry Jenkins: the milieu is so middle-class it's almost fantastic, packed with references to antiquity, to

Summer loving: Timothée Chalamet, Armie Hammer

Liszt and Bach, Heidegger and Heraclitus. In this regard and in others, Guadagnino is remarkably faithful to Aciman's text, though he transposes the action from the Italian Riviera to the Lombardy countryside and streamlines the narrative by culling certain characters. He also – intriguingly – does away with a framing device that casts the main narrative as a flashback (the book has the men meet in middle age, while Guadagnino's film finishes six months after the events of the summer). Still, the film retains a certain Proustian sensibility. The camera pays an almost hyperreal attention to detail, poring over certain words and touches with the obsessiveness of an infatuated teenager. Apichatpong Weerasethakul's regular DP Sayombhu Mukdeeprom's images are precise, saturated with cerulean blues, limoncello yellows, cherry reds and blushing apricots, but at the same time slightly worn and fuzzy, like a well-washed shirt. The world beyond Elio and Oliver's immediate sphere is somehow faded (women, in particular, seem to hover out of focus in the background). Even the sound edit seems to over-amplify their voices.

The 1980s period setting heightens this effect. *Call Me by Your Name* is awash with details such as a Robert Mapplethorpe print, a Talking Heads T-shirt, a Penguin Classic. At an outdoor discotheque, Elio and Oliver dance to The Psychedelic Furs. It's a backdrop that will raise a fond smile for many viewers. But Guadagnino's setting is in a sense a platonic ideal of the 1980s. How many of us were ever so lithe and gorgeous, so intelligent and self-possessed? How many of us once knew the longing, and how many, really, the having? As Professor Perlman tells his son in an extraordinarily moving scene, a love like Elio and Oliver's is rare indeed, and before we even know it, our best days our behind us. On the strength of this film, let's hope that Guadagnino's are not.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Producers**
Peter Spears
Luca Guadagnino
Emilie Georges
Rodrigo Teixera
Marco Morabito
James Ivory
Howard Rosenman
**Written by**
James Ivory
Based on the novel by André Aciman
**Director of Photography**
Sayombhu Mukdeeprom
**Editor**
Walter Fasano
**Production Designer**
Samuel Deshors
**Production Sound Mixer**
Yves-Marie Omnes
**Costume Designer**
Giulia Piersanti

**Production Companies**
Memento Films International, RT Features, M.Y.R.A. Entertainment present a Frenesy Film, La Cinéfacture co-production
In association with Water's End Productions
A film by Luca Guadagnino
**Executive Producers**
Derek Simonds
Tom Dolby
Margarethe Baillou
Francesco Melzi D'eril
Naima Abed
Nicholas Kaiser
Sophie Mas
Lourenço Sant'Anna

**Cast**
**Armie Hammer**
Oliver
**Timothée Chalamet**
Elio Perlman
**Michael Stuhlbarg**
Mr Perlman
**Amira Casar**
Annella Perlman
**Esther Garrel**
Marzia
**Victoire Du Bois**
Chiara
**Vanda Capriolo**
Mafalda
**Antonio Rimoldi**
Anchise
**Elena Bucci**
**Marco Sgrosso**
art historians
**André Aciman**
Mounir
**Peter Spears**
Isaac

**In Colour**
**[1.85:1]**
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

**Lombardy, Italy, 1983. Every summer, Professor Perlman and his wife Annella open their home to a visiting postdoctoral researcher; this year the handsome Oliver has come to revise his manuscript on Heraclitus. The Perlmans' 17-year-old son Elio is immediately fascinated by Oliver. As the summer goes on, his interest becomes overtly sexual, but he hesitates to act on his desire, and both he and Oliver have dalliances with local girls. Finally, Elio confesses his feelings to Oliver and the pair embark on a covert affair. It is not clear whether or not Perlman and Annella are aware of the relationship, but when Oliver's time at the villa comes to the end, they encourage Elio to travel to Clusone with him before he returns to America. The two young men spend a few days together hiking and drinking before saying their farewells. Back at the villa, Perlman consoles Elio, telling him that what he and Oliver shared was special. Some months later, Oliver telephones and tells Elio that he is getting married. The film closes on Elio's weeping face.**

# The Death of Stalin

France/Canada/Belgium/United Kingdom 2017
Director: Armando Iannucci
Certificate 15 106m 31s

See Feature on page 40

**Reviewed by Lisa Mullen**

Armando Iannucci has frequently been admired for the uncanny prescience of his satire, and indeed his depictions of the mendacity and incompetence at the heart of contemporary politics often seem to be several steps ahead of the game. His latest comic masterpiece, however, demonstrates that the farcical contortions of morality and logic by which greedy men seek power form a pattern as old as politics itself. Here, the post-war Soviet Union becomes a laboratory where the chemical elements of ambition, stupidity and ruthlessness are combined to make a particularly dangerous and volatile compound. It's absolutely hilarious... but also, people die.

The root of the comedy is the cult of personality that Stalin has erected around himself, based on the idea that the tiniest affront to his authority can result in instant death. This is concisely demonstrated in the film's opening segment, which shows the dictator (Adrian McLoughlin) telephoning a radio station to say that he has enjoyed a Mozart concerto and would like a recording of it; panic ensues when the producer (Paddy Considine) realises that no recording has been made. The terrified conductor passes out, another is dragged from his bed to conduct the piece in his pyjamas, and the deeply alarmed audience are locked in the hall so that the concert can be replayed with an identical sense of atmosphere.

This set-up – transferred directly from the opening of the graphic novel by Fabien Nury and Thierry Robin on which the film is based – beautifully encapsulates the problem with Stalin's creaking regime: even before his death, he has created a power vacuum by turning himself into a kind of mythical creature. When, shortly afterwards, he is felled by a stroke, there is a long pause while members of the Presidium muster the courage to utter the treasonous thought that their infallible leader was, in fact, mortal. But then, as the reality gains momentum, a feral survivalism kicks in – and the fun begins.

Quickest off the mark is Lavrenti Beria (Simon Russell Beale), head of the secret police, a puppetmaster with many bloodstained strings to pull. He cannily installs the vain idiot Georgy Malenkov (an enjoyable turn by Jeffrey Tambor) as a placeholder head of state, until he can torture and intimidate his way to power – but he has underestimated Nikita Khrushchev (Steve Buscemi). Khrushchev may not be able to access the secret infrastructures of the state as Beria can, but he is an attentive student both of human nature and of irony, and in the end that counts for more. Our sympathies naturally follow Iannucci's here: Khrushchev can hardly be described as a white hat, but we side with him because of his clear-eyed acceptance that he is operating inside a madhouse, and because it's fun to watch his nimble footwork outwitting the heavy-hitting Beria.

Pitching Russell Beale and Buscemi against each other is one of the masterstrokes of casting that make the film such a joy to watch: Russell Beale, brimful of Shakespearean subtlety, has both deeply funny bones and a ready access to the realm of the sinister; Buscemi, sometimes called

Move over, Stalin: Steve Buscemi, Michael Palin, Paul Whitehouse

on to be merely peculiar, reminds us that he is a craftsman with a genius for conjuring sympathy out of the unlikeliest material. Iannucci's own genius (abetted by co-writers David Schneider and Ian Martin) is the ability to give them lines of perfect comic cadence and deep reservoirs of unspoken intent; they know exactly what to do with them, as do the rest of this superb ensemble. Michael Palin is perfect as Vyacheslav Molotov, a simpering bureaucrat who has decided that the only way to survive Stalin is to sacrifice everything, including his dignity, his autonomy and – oh yes, come to think of it, his wife; Rupert Friend is a revelation as Vasily Stalin, the drunken son who provides some of the broadest slapstick in the piece; and Andrea Riseborough has the only decent female role as Vasily's sister Svetlana, treated as a pathetic damsel in distress by the men around her but proving to have an astute eye for the real peril of her situation. And then there is a delicious late-stage scene-stealer by Jason Isaacs as General Zhukov, the man of action who delivers the decisive blow to Beria's scheming.

Much of the visual style – the blood-and-snow palette, the sense of the squirmingly personal caught within the rigid apparatus of state – is clearly inspired by the work of Nury and Robin, but the whipsmart dialogue and deftly syncopated timing are pure Iannucci. The film is uproariously funny but painfully close to the bone in a world where once again the lunatics have taken over the asylum.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Yann Zenou
Laurent Zeitoun
Nicolas Duval Adassovsky
Kevin Loader
**Original Screenplay**
Fabien Nury
**Written by**
Armando Iannucci
David Schneider
Ian Martin
Based on the comic books *The Death of Stalin* by Fabien Nury, Thierry Robin
**Additional Material**
Peter Fellows
**Director of Photography**
Zac Nicholson

**Editor**
Peter Lambert
**Production Designer**
Cristina Casali
**Music**
Christopher Willis
**Production Sound Mixer**
Martin Beresford
**Costume Designer**
Suzie Harman

©Mitico, Main Journey, Gaumont, France 3 Cinéma, AFPI, Panache Productions, La compagnie cinématographique, Death of Stalin the Film Ltd

**Production Companies**
Gaumont presents a Quad and Main Journey production in co-production with Gaumont, France 3 Cinéma, La compagnie cinématographique, Panache Productions, AFPI
An Armando Iannucci film
With the participation of Canal+, Ciné+, France Télévisions
Developed with the support of Indéfilms Initiative 4, Cinemage Developpement, Cinemage 10 Developpement
With the support of The Tax Shelter of the Federal Government of Belgium and the Tax Shelter from Movie Tax Invest - Ambre Chouraqui Tax Shelter investors Entezari Urolap SPRL, Atlico SPRL, Le Groupe Ramaut, Sterop Overseas SA, Celes Immo SCRL, Marina Blitz SPRL
In association with Title Media
**Executive Producer**
Jean-Christophe Colson

**Cast**
**Steve Buscemi**
Nikita Khrushchev
**Simon Russell Beale**
Lavrenti Beria
**Paddy Considine**
Andreyev
**Rupert Friend**
Vasily Stalin
**Jason Isaacs**
Field Marshall Georgy Zhukov
**Olga Kurylenko**
Maria Veniaminovna Yudina
**Michael Palin**
Vyacheslav Molotov
**Andrea Riseborough**
Svetlana Stalina
**Paul Chahidi**
Nicolai Bulganin
**Dermot Crowley**
Lazar Kaganovich
**Adrian McLoughlin**
Joseph Stalin
**Paul Whitehouse**
Anastas Mikoyan
**Jeffrey Tambor**
Georgy Malenkov

**In Colour**
**[1.85:1]**

**Distributor**
E1 Films

French theatrical title
**La Mort de Staline**

**USSR, 1953. At the height of his power, Joseph Stalin holds the entire Soviet empire in thrall because everyone knows that punishment by death can be instant and arbitrary. When he has a stroke in the private room of his dacha, no one comes to his aid, since his staff are too afraid of doing the wrong thing. Members of the Presidium eventually gather at the house, but they delay medical treatment while they argue about what Stalin would want them to do. Though outwardly motivated by devotion to their leader, in private they are jostling for power; with pompous idiot Georgy Malenkov notionally in charge, chief plotters Lavrenti Beria and Nikita Khrushchev battle for control. Arrangements for Stalin's funeral provide the backdrop for the clash between their opposing political styles: Beria, the master spy, manoeuvres himself into place by terror and torture, while Khrushchev the networker scuttles between key players, forging alliances. When Khrushchev finally gains the upper hand and has Beria killed, there is a sense of relief, but also of apprehension.**

# Deliver Us (Libera Nos)

Italy/France 2016
Director: Federica Di Giacomo
Certificate 15 93m 54s

**Reviewed by Anton Bitel**

In 2005, on christianforums.com, Nathan Poe articulated the principle, now commonly known online as Poe's Law, which observes that "without a winking smiley or other blatant display of humor", it is impossible to distinguish a mocking parody of a fundamentalist position from the genuine article. The spirit of Poe possesses *Deliver Us*, a documentary from Federica Di Giacomo (*Housing*, 2009) that tracks Cataldo Migliazzo, an in-demand Franciscan priest in Sicily, as he performs exorcisms, both collectively and individually, on an ever-growing number of folk convinced there is a devil inside them. For even as there seems to be little questioning the strength of Father Cataldo's religious faith, the film casts doubt over whether his flock is mentally ill, manipulatively attention-seeking, or actually possessed (whatever that might mean).

Giacomo has gained extraordinarily intimate access to her subjects, and her cinematographers Greta De Lazzaris and Carlo Sisalli stay close to Cataldo in his ceremonial services, his crowded office meetings and his home-visit exorcisms, while also following select parishioners in and around the church and even in their cars as they go about both their processes of exorcism and their daily business. This probing observational style comes with all the naturalism that 'fly on the wall' implies, and yet the banality is occasionally punctuated by some very strange ritual behaviour. So inherently bizarre is the material that Giacomo can just keep her cameras rolling on Cataldo and his congregation and capture all manner of absurdities without any need to provide ironising voiceover commentary. Of course, editing helps heighten some of these incongruities.

The sight (and sound) of Cataldo performing this most ancient of rites down a modern cell phone to an audibly growling interlocutor is already rich with odd dissonances, but instead of cutting when the ritual is over, Giacomo lingers so that we hear Cataldo close with, "Speak again soon... and give my regards to your husband," as if nothing unusual has happened. Even more hilariously, the interlocutor, moments earlier apparently a snarling vessel of Satan, now wishes Cataldo a "happy Christmas". At least this woman appears to believe.

Exorcise addicts: *Deliver Us*

Once young Giulia has undergone several 'Masses of Liberation' with Cataldo and has been 'cured' of her possession, she declines an invitation to attend a normal Mass because, she says, "it bores me".

She is not the only one who fails to see any contradiction in embracing one Catholic rite while otherwise rejecting the tenets of Catholic faith. A tattooed young man, awaiting the outcome of a criminal trial (but still happy to snort cocaine in front of the camera), pursues, week after week, a one-on-one audience with Cataldo, while excusing his lack of faith with the paradoxical words: "Some disorders exist whether you believe or not." Later, having writhed about on the church floor and thrown a chair or two as though bedevilled, he admits to camera that this is the only way to get the priest's attention ("That's how it works"). Similarly, Grazia, who is evidently visiting a wide circuit of doctors and priests with her ill-defined condition, knows how to make a performance of being possessed if it will get her the notice she craves. When she crouches, wide-eyed, against a church wall, issuing strange feline noises, a priest (this time not Cataldo) observes that the devil has become "a cure-all", and that without the exorcism rite "they'd no longer be the centre of attention". The same priest also responds to Grazia'a animalistic enactment with precisely the winking smile that has otherwise been missing from the film – and lets us feel that the occasional insider sees the ridiculous side of this satanised community as much as we do.

These people all seem genuinely troubled and in need of help – but the question remains whether (and why) they should be seeking answers in a religious ceremonial that is out of step with our secular times, and often with their own beliefs. What emerges is a view of a postmodern society in which Catholic exorcism has become just one item from a menu of personal-care options available to fill the day, barely different from visiting a hairdresser (which we also see Grazia do). The results, though presented with a po-face, deliver sly laughs. S

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Francesco Virga
**Written by**
Federica Di Giacomo
Andrea Sanguigni
**Photography**
Greta De Lazzaris
Carlo Sisalli
**Editing**
Aline Hervé
Edoardo Morabito
**Sound Recording**
Mariano Blanco
Mirko Cangiamila
Danila Romancino

©MIR Cinematografica, Operà Films
**Production Companies**
A film by Federica Di Giacomo
A MIR Cinematografica production with RAI Cinema
In co-production with Opera Films with France 3 Via Stella
With the contribution of CNC - Centre National du cinéma et de l'image animée
With the support of Sicilia Film Commission, Procirep - Angoa, L'Atelier di Post-produzione Milano Film Network 2015
**Executive Producers**
Davide Pagano
Francesco Virga

**In Colour**
**[1.78:1]**
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**
Network Releasing

Italian theatrical title
**Liberami**

**A documentary following Franciscan priest Father Cataldo Migliazzo as he performs ritual exorcisms on a growing number of congregants in Sicily.**

# Double Date

United Kingdom 2017
Director: Benjamin Barfoot
Certificate 15 89m 21s

**The hateful date: Kelly Wenham**

**Reviewed by Nikki Baughan**

While seemingly at opposite ends of the emotional spectrum, horror and comedy can make for extremely comfortable bedfellows. Laughter and terror are two of the most visceral responses a filmmaker can hope to elicit from an audience and, when traversed correctly, the ground between them can prove dramatically fertile.

Although it skews more towards the funny than the fearsome, *Double Date*, the debut feature from Benjamin Barfoot, successfully bridges this divide thanks largely to an assured, whipsmart screenplay from writer-star Danny Morgan (who wrote and starred in hit YouTube short *Where Did It All Go Ron?*, also directed by Barfoot). While comparisons with films such as *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and *Tucker and Dale Vs Evil* (2010) are easy and obvious, they are fair; like the directors of those films, Morgan skilfully mines the entertainment value of outlandish things happening to extremely ordinary people.

Morgan also takes the central role of Jim, an introverted red-headed virgin who, on the eve of his 30th birthday, is persuaded by his loutish mate Alex (Michael Socha) to go out in search of female company. When the pair meet seductive sisters Lulu (Georgia Groome) and Kitty (Kelly Wenham), who immediately agree to join them for a debauched night on the town, they think their luck is well and truly in.

What this pair of wannabe ladykillers don't know – but we do, thanks to an opening sequence that turns genre convention on its head by showing Lulu and Kitty slaughtering other young men, pleasingly set to the strains of Yazoo's pop hit 'Only You' – is that this night may be memorable for all the wrong reasons.

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Matthew James Wilkinson
Maggie Monteith
**Screenplay**
Danny Morgan
**Director of Photography**
Laura Bellingham
**Editor**
Benjamin Barfoot
**Production Designer**
Jabez Bartlett

**Score**
Goat
**Sound Design**
Steven Parker
Richard Lewis
**Costume Designer**
Lindsey Archer
**Visual Effects**
Goodbye Kansas London
**Stunt Co-ordinator**
Levan Doran

©Merrymeet Films Limited
**Production Companies**
Dignity Film Finance, Merrymeet Films and Film Constellation present a Stigma Films production in association with Great Point Media and Previse Media
A film by Benjamin Barfoot
**Executive Producers**
Chris Reed
Jim Reeve
Robert Halmi

**Cast**
**Danny Morgan**
Jim
**Georgia Groome**
Lulu
**Kelly Wenham**
Kitty
**Michael Socha**
Alex
**Liz Kingsman**
Laura
**Dexter Fletcher**
Ken
**Dean Ridge**
Jack
**Harry Michell**
Harry
**Olivia Poulet**
Jennifer
**Hugh Hemmings**
Old Jim

**In Colour**
**[2.35:1]**

**Distributor**
Pinpoint

**London, the present. Beautiful sisters Lulu and Kitty are enjoying an evening with two young men at their impressive home; inviting her date upstairs, Kitty suddenly stabs him to death before urging her sister to do the same with her young man.**

**Later, introvert virgin Jim and loudmouth Alex are celebrating Jim's upcoming 30th birthday. They meet Lulu and Kitty in a bar and the foursome head out for a night of clubbing. The sisters, intent on getting the boys back to their place, lace their drinks with drugs. Their plans are thwarted when a now high Jim determines to visit his parents for traditional birthday cake; when he returns, a crash forces a visit to Alex's deadbeat father in order to borrow his car. When they finally arrive at the sisters' home, Kitty's attempt to despatch Alex results in a vicious fight to the death. Jim discovers that the sisters have been engaging in some serious black magic to reanimate the corpse of their beloved father. After Kitty is bested and Jim decapitates the ghoulish Daddy, the police arrive and apprehend Lulu.**

That the viewer is in on the sisters' dark secret from the start is part of the film's charm, the knowledge of their post-date activities bringing an edge of tension and, often, delicious double meaning to the boys' romantic bumblings. "They are just girls," says an unwitting Alex to a nervous Jim. "What's there to be afraid of?"

The boys' stupidity is no match for the girls' sharp seductions – bloodlust being rather more calculating than the hormonal kind – and much of the resulting action is therefore played for laughs. That is established right from an early scene in which Alex guides Jim through a bar-side pick-up routine via text, hampered both by Jim's inexperience and some painful auto-correct. (Another standout sequence involves Jim, unknowingly high on drugs laced in his drink, visiting his parents for some birthday cake and a silent one-man dance-off in their living room.)

This laddy bromance is, however, underpinned by real feeling, Morgan's screenplay mining the vulnerable, emotional heart of this adult male friendship. The naturalistic performances and genuine chemistry between the boys is helped along by swathes of excellent improvisation – Shane Meadows alumnus Socha proves himself a master of the expertly delivered one-liner – and their infectious charm gives the film a momentum that's further propelled by Goat's pulsing score.

A sequence in which the foursome visit Alex's deadbeat dad (a perfectly pitched cameo from Dexter Fletcher) in his trailer, ostensibly to borrow his car, gives the loutish Alex the chance to showcase some emotion of his own, as he is sweetly affectionate towards the father he is so obviously embarrassed by. Equally importantly, Morgan resists the urge to turn the hapless Jim into a wannabe action hero; there's always the sense that these are just normal guys trying to have fun, get laid... and, ultimately, survive.

As the female players of this quartet, Groome and Wenham give animated performances, in spite of their characters being far more broadly sketched. Groome is quietly expressive as the more reserved thinker Lulu, whose connection with Jim is the catalyst for a change of heart and a shift in loyalties. Wenham is mesmerising as femme fatale Kitty, whose poised persona is at odds with her hobbies of bloody murder and satanic rituals – which, as we finally discover when Jim heads down to the basement, are all designed to reanimate the corpse of the girls' beloved, and very dead, daddy. And it's Wenham who is given the film's best scene, after Alex finally makes it into Kitty's bedroom only to discover that he is, in fact, her intended victim. As the pair engage in an ultra-long, ultra-violent death match, Alex is initially concerned about hitting a girl, but Kitty proves more than equal opposition. It's a masterfully choreographed, cathartic sequence, and a treat to see a strong female character allowed both to fight and be fought with.

That *Double Date* hinges on this literal battle of the sexes means it could easily have fallen into cliché quicksand. But the film's knowing wit and energetic pace ensure that it sidesteps any thematic quagmire to become a breezy, enjoyable slice of British genre cinema; not to mention a biting cautionary tale about the modern dating scene.

# The Exception

Germany/USA/Switzerland/Belgium 2016
Director: David Leveaux
Certificate 15 107m 11s

**Reviewed by Philip Kemp**

Monarchs who abdicate tend to drop out of history. Who now remembers what became of Charles X of France, or of Vittorio Emanuele III of Italy? And not many people, it's probably safe to say, can recall what happened to Kaiser Wilhelm II of Hohenzollern, he of the upturned double-spike moustache and countless 'Kaiser Bill' caricatures in the British press, after he stepped down from the imperial throne of Germany in 1918. Few would know that he retreated to the Netherlands and lived there, in a relatively modest pile (at least by Kaiserly standards) near Utrecht, until his death in 1941.

Still fewer, it's a sure bet, would know that in his final years the ex-Kaiser was (barring the occasional outburst about "Jews and Bolsheviks") a charming, tolerant old fellow with a love of ducks, woodcutting and the novels of P.G. Wodehouse, someone who would be happy to connive at the escape from the Gestapo of an attractive young Dutch-Jewish woman who was spying for the British. But such is the rather unexpected figure we're presented with in theatre director David Leveaux's feature debut *The Exception*.

Nor is that the only improbability in Simon Burke's screenplay (based on the novel *The Kaiser's Last Kiss* by Alan Judd) that we're asked to swallow. They come thick and fast right up to the final scene where our hero, Wehrmacht officer Stefan Brandt (Jai Courtney) is able to receive at his Berlin desk a Red Cross parcel from London, unopened and unchecked, containing a book inscribed with a message from his Jewish lover. Given that Brandt was previously in trouble for assaulting a fellow officer who had massacred some Poles, you'd think the Gestapo would at least keep an eye on his mail. Altogether, even Lewis Carroll's White

**Mission improbable: Christopher Plummer**

Queen, accustomed to believing "as many as six impossible things before breakfast", might have had a few problems with *The Exception*.

Luckily, there's plenty to enjoy in the acting. Courtney (*Divergent*, *Insurgent*) makes something of a stolid presence as Brandt, but Lily James (Natasha in the BBC's *War and Peace*, Ansel Elgort's love interest in *Baby Driver*) is all erotic fire and determination as the spy who loves him. Janet McTeer as Princess Hermine, the ex-Kaiser's second wife (his first died in 1921), exudes aristocratic hauteur frequently tinged with hysteria; and as the ex-Kaiser, Christopher Plummer conveys a wily hint of suppressed amusement at the absurdity of the whole enterprise, whether tossing bread to his cherished ducks or throwing a tantrum at the dinner table ("Am I to blame for every misfortune on this earth?"). But acting honours are stolen by Eddie Marsan's transient irruption as Heinrich Himmler, a frog-like incarnation of the banality of evil, smugly explaining to his appalled dinner hosts how superfluous disabled children can best be disposed of: give them red balloons to play with while injecting phenol into their hearts. For one brief moment the horror of reality invades the fairytale world of *The Exception*.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Judy Tossell
Lou Pitt
**Screenplay**
Simon Burke
Based on the novel *The Kaiser's Last Kiss* by Alan Judd
**Director of Photography**
Roman Osin
**Editor**
Nicolas Gaster
**Production Designer**
Hubert Pouille
**Music**
Ilan Eshkeri
**Sound**
Henri Morelle
Alek Goosse
François Dumont
**Costume Designer**
Daniela Ciancio

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**Production Companies**
An Egoli Tossell Film/Ostar production in association with Alton Road Productions, Silver Reel, Lotus Entertainment, Umedia and Film House Germany
Supported by
Screen Flanders
**Executive Producers**
Philip H. Geier Jr
Bill Haber
Bob Boyett
Eugene Beard
Claudia Bluemhuber
Florian Dargel
Irene Gall
Ian Hutchinson
Adrian Politowski
Gilles Waterkeyn
Bastien Sirodot
Bill Johnson
Bill Seibel
Jens Meurer
Philip Moross
James Gibb
Christian Angermayer
Klemens Hallmann

### Cast

**Lily James**
Mieke de Jong
**Jai Courtney**
Captain Stefan Brandt
**Janet McTeer**
Princess Hermine Reuss of Greiz, 'Hermo'
**Christopher Plummer**
Kaiser Wilhelm II
**Ben Daniels**
Colonel Sigurd von Ilsemann
**Eddie Marsan**
Heinrich Himmler
**Anton Lesser**
General Falkenberg
**Mark Dexter**
Dietrich
**Martin Savage**
Dirksen

**In Colour**
**[2.35:1]**

**Distributor**
Signature Entertainment

**The Netherlands, May 1940, shortly after the German invasion. Sent to guard ex-Kaiser Wilhelm II, who has been living in exile in Doorn since 1918, Wehrmacht captain Stefan Brandt is stationed in the gatehouse. Gestapo inspector Dietrich warns him that there is a British spy nearby who may try to assassinate the Kaiser. A maid, Mieke de Jong, comes to convey the Kaiser's invitation to dinner; Brandt tells her to strip and has sex with her. The next evening, Mieke comes to Brandt's room; this time she tells him to strip. In the village she sends messages to London via the pastor.**

**On the pretext of keeping closer guard on the Kaiser, Brandt moves into the house, continuing his affair with Mieke. She tells him she's Jewish. It is announced that Heinrich Himmler will be paying a visit. The pastor is arrested and tortured. Himmler arrives; he tells the Kaiser and his wife that Hitler wants them to return to Berlin. Before leaving, he confides to Brandt and Dietrich that this is a plan to flush out monarchists. Brandt betrays this to the Kaiser's aide, Colonel von Ilsemann. The pastor cracks under torture; Brandt gets Mieke out of the house. Finding the Kaiser in the woods, she conveys a message from Churchill offering him sanctuary. The Kaiser collapses; Brandt summons an ambulance and smuggles Mieke out with him, shooting two Gestapo men at the gate. As Mieke leaves, she promises to marry Brandt once the war is over. The Kaiser, pleased to see her escape, decides not to go to Berlin. In London, Mieke sends Brandt a book before attending a debriefing with Churchill.**

# Goodbye Christopher Robin

USA/United Kingdom/Isle of Man 2017
Director: Simon Curtis
Certificate PG 106m 51s

**Reviewed by Matthew Taylor**

Later in life, the illustrator and cartoonist E.H. Shepard was known to ruefully remark how Winnie the Pooh – the beloved 'silly old bear' that he and author A.A. Milne introduced to the world in the mid-1920s – had completely overshadowed his hitherto varied career. The theme of lives being forever defined by an unleashed and uncontrollable phenomenon is explored with considerable poignancy in Simon Curtis's *Goodbye Christopher Robin*, which focuses on the uneasy relationship between Milne (Domhnall Gleeson) and the young son who famously became part of his stories.

The film opens *in medias res* during the early days of WWII, with the middle-aged Milne receiving an ominous telegram at his Sussex country estate. From there, we flash back to the aftermath of another war, as Milne – traumatised by his battlefield experiences at the Somme – struggles to reintegrate into the London literary set that he and wife Daphne (Margot Robbie) are part of. The screenplay, by Frank Cottrell-Boyce and Simon Vaughan (the latter also worked on 2004's *A Bear Named Winnie*, a TV film about the origins of Pooh's name), doesn't skimp on Milne's debilitating shell shock, which first curtails a vaunted one-man show and later exacerbates his creative block. A retreat to the countryside offers its own challenges, the buzzing of bees in the surrounding 'Hundred Acre' wood whisking Milne back to the trenches and the sound of flies circling corpses. In Cottrell-Boyce and Vaughan's retelling, it's Christopher Robin (impressive newcomer Will Tilston) who helps his father overcome his demons, the forest eventually becoming the idyllic backdrop for Pooh and company's adventures.

Christopher Robin's parents affectionately call him 'Billy Moon', a nickname that becomes crucial to the boy's sense of self after his real name provides unwanted fame. With Milne labouring to finish his pacifist treatise *Peace with Honour*, and Daphne often away in London, Christopher grows close to his childless nanny Olive (Kelly Macdonald). This forthright Scot coaxes Milne out of his study, encouraging

Book cub: Will Tilston

the writer to spend more time with his son. The warmly observed scenes that ensue see the genesis of Pooh's world, Milne basing his famous characters on Christopher's stuffed toys. A trip to London Zoo, meanwhile, provides a sighting of the brown bear, newly transferred from Winnipeg, that gives Milne's creation its name. This period of intimacy between father and son begins to fracture, however, when the resulting books turn Christopher into a global celebrity. Though Milne and the similarly war-damaged Shepard (Stephen Campbell Moore) see their work as a return to innocence, it inadvertently leads to Christopher losing his own.

Gleeson is fine as the terse, tetchy and ultimately guilt-stricken Milne, though Robbie seems miscast in the trickier, often unsympathetic role of Daphne. The standout performance belongs to Macdonald, who brings genuine emotional potency to her scenes as the all-seeing Olive. In one piercing moment, she castigates the Milnes for neglecting their child, offering that "a cow can give birth" in response to Daphne's indignant assertion of her maternal travails. A latter section of the film sees the teenage Christopher (played by Alex Lawther) endure bullies at boarding school and enlist in the army on the advent of WWII. This feels a little hurried, and there's something unavoidably manipulative about the resolution of Christopher's military service. Even so, sentimentality is mostly kept at arm's reach – unlike the famous bear, the film doesn't overindulge in the honey.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Damian Jones
Steve Christian
**Written by**
Frank Cottrell-Boyce
Simon Vaughan
**Director of Photography**
Ben Smithard
**Film Editor**
Victoria Boydell
**Production Designer**
David Roger
**Music by/Score Conducted by**
Carter Burwell
**Production Sound Mixer**
Adrian Bell
**Costume Designer**
Odile Dicks-Mireaux

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**Production Companies**
Fox Searchlight Pictures presents in association with TSG Entertainment a DJ Films/Gasworks Media production
**Executive Producers**
Simon Curtis
Simon Vaughan

### Cast

**Domhnall Gleeson**
Alan Milne (A.A. Milne)
**Margot Robbie**
Daphne Milne
**Kelly Macdonald**
Olive
**Alex Lawther**
Christopher Robin Milne aged 18
**Will Tilston**
Christopher Robin Milne aged 8
**Stephen Campbell Moore**
Ernest (E.H. Shepard)
**Vicki Pepperdine**
Betty
**Richard McCabe**
Rupert
**Geraldine Somerville**
Lady O
**Phoebe Waller-Bridge**
Mary Brown

**In Colour**
**[2.35:1]**

**Distributor**
20th Century Fox International (UK)

**London, 1920. Traumatised by his military service during World War I, writer A.A. Milne struggles to work. He and his wife Daphne have a son, Christopher Robin. The family moves – to socialite Daphne's chagrin – to a country home in Sussex. Milne's increasing distance and writer's block leads the frustrated Daphne to spend time away in London. As a result, Christopher becomes close to his nanny, Olive. Christopher's stuffed toys, and the surrounding woods, inspire Milne to create – with illustrator E.H. Shepard – children's books featuring the bear Winnie the Pooh and Christopher himself. The books prove hugely popular, but Christopher comes to resent his newfound fame. Olive marries, but before leaving the Milnes' employ she berates them for their parental neglect. At boarding school, the teenage Christopher's renown makes him the target of bullies. On the outbreak of World War II, Christopher enlists in the army, against his father's wishes. Before leaving, he rebukes his father for exploiting his childhood. Months later, the Milnes receive word that Christopher is missing, presumed dead. Milne reconciles with Olive. Christopher later returns home alive and well.**

# Grace Jones Bloodlight and Bami

Ireland/United Kingdom/Austria/France/Germany 2017
Director: Sophie Fiennes, Certificate 15 115m 20s

**Reviewed by Kate Stables**

"The performer out there takes the risk. It's a lonely place. But a fascinating, lonely place." The indomitable Grace Jones is still driving solo, steering an art-rock singing career that thrived through 1970s disco and 1980s reggae-inflected new wave and has lately installed her as a festival favourite.

Sophie Fiennes's film portrait of the singer's gypsy life, filmed over several years, is an atmospheric fly-on-the-wall piece that shows off her eccentric, glamorous persona. Laced through with excellent concert footage of Jones, whose songs have subtle links to the sequences around them, its style is otherwise strictly observational. For Grace Jones fans, those who are slaves to her rhythm, this makes for a box of delights – Jones is unfailingly open, garrulous and captivating. Yet without narration, any kind of onscreen titling for places, people or dates, and no archive footage, this engrossing documentary can be confusing or a tad irritating. Watching Jones chase down her old collaborators Sly and Robbie on the phone, and tongue-lash them into recording her comeback album *Hurricane*, is a hoot only for the initiated. So is hearing her rambling account to Damon Albarn of her 1980 chat-show slap-and-spat with Russell Harty, which makes one long to see the TV clip.

However, Fiennes's film is located firmly in the bubble of Jones's world, riding shotgun as she bounces around the globe, between gigs, recordings and a family visit in Jamaica. This last sojourn, shot with a lo-fi, wobbly-cam aesthetic around crowded dinner tables and in crammed cars, is the one section showing a new side to Jones. Blending into her clan, she's without artifice, pressing her siblings for childhood memories of their abusive grandfather, or squatting on the floor of a neighbour's house to play a game of jacks. Her mutable accent, which slides from mid-Atlantic rock star to cockney to gravelly non-specific European diva when she's working (with forays into fluent French), is firmly Jamaican at home. Linking the personal to the public, the film weaves in footage of Jones recording and performing songs

Grace abounding: Grace Jones

rooted in her childhood, such as 'Williams' Blood', and warning the audience that "to get my beating out, I have to beat *you*".

Fiennes's tendency to let the camera run on (as in *Hoover Street Revival*, her 2002 film about Jones's Pentecostal minister brother) gives an intimate feel, and captures some gems – including an impressively naked Jones, a hilariously kitsch French TV variety appearance and Jones out-partying her adult son. There's a sprawling feel to these sections, though, a self-indulgence that is only redeemed by the first-rate, up-close concert footage. Prowling the stage, growling at her worshipping audience while resplendent in sculptural costumes and outlandish Philip Treacy headpieces, performing 'Pull up to the Bumper' in her sixties with erotic energy and élan, Jones is simply magnificent. With the band firmly behind her as she works the stage with hula hoop or giant cymbals, she's the sweating, whooping, booty-shaking antithesis of Dietrich-style nostalgia cabaret. If the film shows little of her everyday private life, it reveals that Jones's wit, warmth and theatricality are her own, on stage and off. We have truly met Miss Jones.

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Katie Holly
Sophie Fiennes
Beverly Jones
Shani Hinton
**Cinematography**
Remko Schnorr
**Editor**
Sophie Fiennes
**Documentary Camera and Sound**
Sophie Fiennes

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**Production Companies**
BBC Films and BFI present in association with Roads Entertainment with the participation of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board
A Sligoville/Amoeba Film/Blinder Films production
With the support of the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Foundation, Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée, Procirep, Angoa, Les Arcs
Developed in association with Sciapode Sarl
Realised with ZDF in cooperation with ARTE
in association with Inevitable Pictures
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund
**Executive Producers**
Christine Langan
Joe Oppenheimer
Lizzie Francke
Keith Potter
Francesca Von Habsburg
Danielle Ryan
Alan Maher
James Wilson
Émilie Blézat

**In Colour**
**[1.85:1]**
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**
Curzon Artificial Eye

**Jamaica, 2008. A fly-on-the-wall travelogue covering several years in the life of singer Grace Jones. The film cuts back and forth between the recording of her 2008 album 'Hurricane', international appearances and a trip to see her family in Jamaica, all mixed with concert footage from her stage show. On her Jamaican visit, Jones visits old haunts and discusses her family background and violent grandfather with her relatives and a one-time neighbour. She persuades musicians Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare to work on 'Hurricane', and they record new tracks. Filming a French TV variety show, she objects to its kitsch staging. Jean-Paul Goude, her one-time lover and collaborator, has a photo-shoot with her. She visits their baby grandchild. When a London company fails to pay upfront, Jones refuses to make a public appearance. She performs gigs in New York. Backstage, she reminisces to Damon Albarn about her spat with Russell Harty on his chat show in 1980. She sees her brother, Pentecostal bishop Noel Jones, preaching in a Jamaican church. He reminisces later about their strict upbringing. In between the 'cinéma vérité' sequences, there is concert footage of Jones performing songs including 'Slave to the Rhythm', 'Pull up to the Bumper', 'My Jamaican Guy' and more recent work such as 'Williams' Blood'.**

# The Graduation

France 2016
Director: Claire Simon

**Reviewed by Adrian Martin**

According to director Claire Simon, the central image that came to define the construction of *The Graduation* appeared by accident, on the very first day of shooting. Setting up a high-angle shot from within La Fémis – France's most prestigious institution for the practical training of filmmakers – she waited for new applicants to arrive for their initial exam. (The 'graduation' of the English title is a misleading translation of *Le Concours*, which refers to the selection process.)

What she then recorded was a charged, even solemn ritual: a small crowd of eager hopefuls already waiting, well before the appointed hour, at the enormous gate, until the order is given to the guard to let them in. As Simon reflected in an interview with *Positif* magazine, it was as if these youngsters were citizens silently demanding: "We want to enter the castle!" She realised that a great deal was at stake in this documentary subject, on both a personal and social level. The entrance process is fiercely competitive: thousands apply each year for only 60 available spots, and (as we learn from the documentary) many reapply time and again.

That opening camera set-up also gave Simon a point of view that she rigorously adheres to for the entire film: it is made from 'within' the institution – but not as official propaganda or a simple celebration of its history, philosophy and achievements. It closely observes the processes whereby the sifting and judging of candidates takes place. Therefore its focus is far more on those who work for La Fémis (from administrators and jurors to the staff who answer the telephones) than on those enduring the examination process.

How easy it would have been for Simon to pick out a few of these candidates, perhaps a group of friends, before this first day, observe them in their daily lives and then follow them through the ordeal to triumph or heartbreak... which would have resulted in the type of conventional documentary that TV producers today demand: one with an overarching 'human story', eliciting the viewer's identification with its heroes and heroines. Simon takes another path. Her method is closer to that of Frederick Wiseman, whom she readily cites as an influence, because she traces the workings of an institution. Yet there is a crucial difference: Simon is less interested than Wiseman in the politics of power, and more drawn to the element of fantasy and desire in social life – a tendency evident in her other documentaries (such as *The Woods Dreams Are Made Of*, 2015) and her fiction features (*Ça brûle*, 2006).

**It's a Fémis affair: *The Graduation***

This sometimes subterranean element of emotion gives *The Graduation* a special richness. Simon lets us observe, in the evaluations of the candidates, the workings of class-based prejudice, the tussles for and against equal-opportunity admission policies, and the often intractable influence of purely subjective bias. The position held by Simon (who has herself been head of this institution's direction department) is clear: if people agree to be servants of the state, their decision-making process should be open to public scrutiny.

Yet for all of that – and this record is full of the juicy details of disagreement and interpersonal tension – La Fémis is still a place of idealism and dreams. Known from 1944 to 1985 as the IDHEC (Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques), it is structured around nine departments, ranging from direction to screenwriting and design and distribution. Its stellar graduates have included François Ozon, Marina de Van, Arnaud Desplechin and Laetitia Masson (who figures prominently on one of the panels documented here).

Underpinning everything we see, whether on the faces of the hopeful students or in the deliberations of their adjudicating elders, is a fervent belief in cinema as a personal, expressive, engaged art. Brief snippets we receive of introductory speeches from the likes of the institution's former director Marc Nicolas (who died in December 2016) and critic Alain Bergala emphasise the lack of a fixed, pedagogical curriculum at La Fémis: instead, professionals are brought in to impart their experience and knowledge through masterclasses and related activities.

Naturally, even under the umbrella of this 'cinema as art' ethos, there is room for differences in the conference rooms of La Fémis. The poor girl who goes blank and cannot recollect the title of a single film she's seen is at a clear disadvantage amid this reigning gang of cinephiles; but the guy who, as an annoyed assessor describes him, "masturbates with Bresson's 'Notes on the Cinematograph' while watching his own rushes" may not fare any better in the final reckoning.

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Arnaud Dommerc
**Production**
Arnaud Dommerc
Belinda Leduc
**Director of Photography**
Claire Simon
**Editor**
Luc Forveille
**Sound**
Olivier Hespel

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**Production**
**Companies**
Andolfi in co-production with Mouvement
present a film by Claire Simon
With the participation of Ciné+
Production: Andolfi
With the support of the Collectivité territoriale de Corse
In partnership with the CNC
**Film Extracts**
*Shokuzai, Celles qui voulaient se souvenir* (2012)

**In Colour**
**[1.78:1]**
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**
DocHouse

French theatrical title
**Le Concours**

**A documentary observation of applicants for the French film school La Fémis. They pass through three stages of examination: a written exercise in scene analysis (from Kurosawa Kiyoshi's 'Penance'); a practical workshop; and an in-depth interview conducted by a panel of industry professionals.**

# I Am Not a Witch

United Kingdom/France 2017
Director: Rungano Nyoni

See Rushes, page 8

**Reviewed by Nikki Baughan**

Ancient tradition and modern capitalism collide in this striking, and strikingly confident, debut feature from Zambian-Welsh filmmaker Rungano Nyoni, who draws on her dual background to craft a tale rich in murky superstition and clear-eyed social commentary. It is set in the small communities around Zambia's capital Lusaka, whose inhabitants wear modern clothes, listen to western music and place great faith in old ideas of spirits and witchcraft.

The film underscores this cultural dichotomy in an eloquent opening sequence, set to the anachronistic strains of Vivaldi, in which a busload of tourists visit a witch camp to gawp at a clutch of elderly women who, their faces painted white, stare impassively before letting loose with grimaces and howls. They are all tied to stakes with huge spools of white ribbon in order that, it is explained, they do not fly away.

In the first of several deft, disorienting hard cuts, the film then moves to the quiet of a rural well, where a woman draws water only to immediately spill the bucket, blaming her misfortune on the young girl standing in her path (exceptional newcomer Maggie Mulubwa) and running from her screaming. The girl's efforts to bring the water to the woman's home result in her being proclaimed a witch.

This early scene, in which incredulous local officer Josephine (Nellie Munamonga) listens to wild accusations she clearly doesn't believe yet is moved by community feeling to call in government agent Mr Banda (Henry B.J. Phiri), further sets the tone. That such beliefs may appear foolish to outsiders – and, probably, many modern African people – but still retain their power is the dramatic impetus of the film. It's to Nyoni's credit that she manages to make the point, as well as call attention to the region's inherent misogyny, without poking fun at those who genuinely believe.

*I Am Not A Witch* is, however, designed to highlight the complicitness of a government that condones such oppression and the tourists who enable it, as well as the grasping greed of profiteers like Banda. Overweight, sweaty and besuited, Banda choreographs a farcical ceremony involving a chicken, proclaims the child a witch and takes her away to the camp. There she is given a name by the other women: Shula, meaning uprooted. As time passes, there is a sense that she is managing to find something of a home among these women; fellow outcasts, they are kind and maternal, even as they inflict on her the pi-shaped scar they all bear on their forehead. In one scene, Shula rests her head on one of the camp's elders as they sit around the fire, a moment of security that is entirely fleeting.

As well as entertaining tourists and working in Banda's fields, the witches are carted out to settle community disputes and perform spells – particularly for desperately needed rain. When Shula, through sheer dumb luck, correctly accuses someone of theftBanda wonders whether she might have genuine powers – though for him this just means further financial opportunity. At this point, Shula completely loses control of her life, as Banda and his overbearing wife train her in the ways of showy witchcraft and demand total obedience. When she refuses to perform, she is punished with solitary confinement inside, ridiculously, a huge clown head.

Myth bluster: Henry B.J. Phiri (right)

This abhorrent treatment is viewed as entirely justifiable by the Trump-like Banda; with egotistical, blustering buffoonery, he tries to manipulate the government, the paying public, the witches and – in one scene where he takes Shula on a talk show to sell 'special' eggs – the media. "Freedom of speech should not be misused," he says, when a caller accuses him of exploiting the girl. "What if she's actually just a child?" responds the host: Banda has no answer. Still, he has influence on those around him. Even Shula eventually succumbs to the fate he has dictated, realising perhaps that she has no viable alternative. Dragged – literally – from the small school she has briefly attended, she spends hours performing a rain dance, until she collapses and is taken to convalesce at the camp.

The narrative's exploration of an alternative human experience is underscored by stunning, evocative cinematography from David Gallego (*Embrace of the Serpent*), which turns the African vistas into an alien landscape. There are many arresting images; a tight focus on Shula's face as she is dragged through the dust by her ribbon; an aerial portrait of the blue-clad witches on their orange truck; white ribbons flapping against the blue sky. Editor George Cragg uses a combination of long takes and sharp cuts to convey the shifting nature of Shula's reality – moments of surreal humour, fleeting happiness and abject fear as her destiny is decided by others. And the eclectic, expertly assembled soundtrack ranges from indigenous music to classical strains, and a surprisingly poignant use of Estelle's 'American Boy'.

The latter comes in a late sequence where a man listens to the song on his headphones as he dumps a small, sheet-wrapped body in a field. That it is Shula is clear, even though we saw her alive in the immediately preceding scene, such was the inevitability of her fate. The film's final moments, in which fellow witches run to retrieve her body, ribbons trailing, and give her their own send-off, are desperately moving. And when the rain finally comes, it is a cathartic moment of raw emotion and beauty.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Juliette Grandmont
Emily Morgan
**Written by**
Rungano Nyoni
**Director of Photography**
David Gallego
**Edited by**
Yann Dedet
George Cragg
Thibault Hague
**Production Designer**
Nathan Parker
**Composer**
Matthew James Kelly
**Sound Recordist**
Olivier Dandre
**Costume Designer**
Holly Rebecca

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**Production Companies**
Film4, Ffilm Cymru Wales, BFI present a Clandestine Films and Soda Pictures production in co-production with Unafilm
Produced with the support of The Hubert Bals Fund and the HBF+ Europe Programme of the International Film Festival Rotterdam with the support of Aide aux cinémas du monde, Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée
With the support of the Résidence du Festival de Cannes - La Cinéfondation et du Moulin d'Andé-CÉCI Centre des Écritures Cinématographiques (DRAC & Région Normandie, Département de l'Eure)
Developed with the proceeds of the National Lottery through BFI Network
Developed through the support of Ffilm Cymru Wales World Cinema Fund is an initiative of the German Federal Cultural Foundation and the Berlin International Film Festival
Supported by the Federal Foreign Office and in further co-operation with the Goethe Institut
Supported by The National Lottery through The Arts Council of Wales
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund
**Executive Producers**
Eve Gabereau
Mary Burke
Eva Yates
Daniel Battsek
Hannah Thomas

### Cast

**Margaret Mulubwa**
Shula
**Henry B.J. Phiri**
government official
**Nancy Mulilo**
Charity
**Margaret Sipaneia**
Mama

**In Colour**
**[2.35:1]**
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**
Curzon Artificial Eye

**Zambia, present day. Tourists arrive at a dusty camp to observe a group of 'witches': elderly ladies, tethered with white ribbon, who shriek and gurn for the cameras. In a nearby village, a young orphan is accused of being a witch and is taken to the camp by government official Mr Banda. The other women name her Shula. When the women are not performing for tourists, they are working in Banda's fields and being taken to settle community disputes for a fee. Realising the lucrative opportunities that Shula presents, Banda appears with her on a local television show, where he is accused of exploitation. Reluctantly, he allows Shula to attend school, though this is curtailed when the camp's elders complain. Accepting her fate, Shula spends hours performing a rain dance, before collapsing. After convalescing in the camp, she wanders out into the night and gathers up her ribbon. We next see her body, wrapped in a white sheet, dumped unceremoniously in the field. Retrieved by her fellow witches, she is given an emotional send-off.**

# Ingrid Goes West

Director: Matt Spicer

**Reviewed by Hannah McGill**

Its title and hip young cast are suggestive of the wry, lo-fi meanderings of *Hannah Takes the Stairs* (2007), *Gabi on the Roof in July* (2010) and *Frances Ha* (2012), but *Ingrid Goes West* is both a glossier and a more controlled experience than such mumblecore offerings. Which is faintly ironic, perhaps, given that the pursuit of gloss and control is precisely what it seeks to critique...

Ingrid, played by Aubrey Plaza, is socially inappropriate, emotionally unruly and in deep grief since the death of her mother. She draws solace from vicarious engagement with the lives of strangers – or rather, with the carefully curated versions of their lives that they present on the photo-sharing social-media platform Instagram. Harmless enough, surely, taking pleasure in other people's superfood brunches and aspirational yoga poses? Sure – unless, like Ingrid, you have trouble differentiating between 'likes' and genuine connection.

The film kicks off with Ingrid violently attacking a woman from whose wedding she has been excluded; the two, we later find, 'knew' each other only on Instagram. A period of mental-health treatment doesn't stop Ingrid fixating all over again, this time on beautiful Los Angeles photographer Taylor Sloane (Elizabeth Olsen). Since Ingrid has money in the form of a substantial inheritance from her mother, and Instagram-ready looks of her own, she's able to infiltrate Taylor's world with minimal difficulty. But the film and Plaza are both extremely good at showing us the small ways in which Ingrid's behaviour gives her away. She swears too much, talks too loudly, spends too freely. She's too enthusiastic, too intense – the antithesis, whatever she wears and whatever guest lists she's on, of cool.

Ingrid thus becomes not only a millennial reboot of the antagonist from 1992's *Single White Female* (a comparison so glaring that it hangs in the film's atmosphere until another character makes it) but also joins a gallery of female characters who have been driven out of their wits by their desperation to be appreciated and admired – in, for instance, *Mommie Dearest* (1981), *To Die For* (1995), *Black Swan* (2010)

Look who's stalking: Olsen, Plaza

and the *Black Mirror* episode 'Nosedive'.

The film's chief issue is one of sympathy: it needs us to like Ingrid enough to engage with her quest, but also to consider that quest underhand, reckless and embarrassing; it needs us to sympathise with Taylor as the victim of stalking and deceit, but also to judge her the very embodiment of triviality. Director and co-writer (with David Branson Smith) Matt Spicer deals with this not so much by deepening character insight as by shuttling our sympathies back and forth between parties. While this is somewhat unsatisfying on a narrative level – we never really establish what Ingrid's issues are, and she seems capable of slipping her madness on and off like one of Taylor's adorable hipster hats – it works because the actors manage the shifts in mood and tone with such conviction. Plaza is just irresistible company, whether in sweet, sad or scary mode; Olsen is likeable enough on screen to carry off Taylor's mix of shallowness and amiability; and even O'Shea Jackson Jr, who's burdened with perhaps the stretchiest character credibility, makes long-suffering landlord/love interest Dan a compelling, funny presence.

Whether the pursuit of media-sanctioned 'perfection' is really as pressing a preoccupation among women as popular culture insists remains moot – but it does seem to be predominantly male filmmakers who find something truthful or satisfying in the trope of the mascara-stained female meltdown.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Producers**
Jared Ian Goldman
Tim White
Trevor White
Adam Mirels
Robert Mirels
Aubrey Plaza
**Screenplay**
David Branson Smith
Matt Spicer
**Director of Photography**
Bryce Fortner
**Edited by**
Jack Price
**Production Designer**
Susie Mancini
**Music**
Jonathan Sadoff
Nick Thorburn
**Sound Design**
Lon Bender
**Costume Designer**
Natalie O'Brien

**Production Companies**
Star Thrower Entertainment presents a 141 Entertainment and Mighty Engine production
A film by Matt Spicer
**Executive Producers**
Mary Solomon
Rick Rickerston
Allan Mandelbaum

### Cast

**Aubrey Plaza**
Ingrid Thorburn
**Elizabeth Olsen**
Taylor Sloane
**Wyatt Russell**
Ezra O'Keefe
**O'Shea Jackson Jr**
Dan Pinto
**Billy Magnussen**
Nicky Sloane
**Pom Klementieff**
Harley Chung

**In Colour**
**[2.35:1]**

**Distributor**
Universal Pictures International
UK & Eire

**US, the present. Furious at not being invited to the wedding of an online 'friend', Ingrid gatecrashes the event and attacks the bride. She subsequently spends time in a mental institution, but on her release finds another online preoccupation: glamorous LA photographer Taylor. Ingrid moves to LA, using an inheritance from her late mother to rent an apartment from charming, nerdy Dan. She steals Taylor's dog, makes a show of returning him and successfully befriends Taylor and her husband Ezra. But her intensity causes suspicion, which increases when Taylor's obnoxious brother Nicky comes to stay. Nicky steals Ingrid's phone, discovers the extent of her obsession with his sister and attempts to blackmail her. Ingrid persuades Dan to help her kidnap and frighten Nicky, but the two men fight and are both badly injured. Ingrid is rejected by Taylor's circle. She confesses on Instagram, and takes an overdose. She wakes in hospital, and Dan tells her, to her delight, that her post has gone viral, spawning a craze for the hashtag 'I Am Ingrid'.**

# It

USA 2017
Director: Andy Muschietti
Certificate 15 134m 31s

**Reviewed by Kim Newman**

First published in 1986, Stephen King's *It* is among the author's most typical works – almost to the point of self-parody. The novel blends the barbed 1950s childhood nostalgia of the tight novella *The Body* (source for the 1986 film *Stand by Me*) with the 'supernatural evil comes to Peyton Place' format of the vampire novel *Salem's Lot* and the Faustian tale *Needful Things*, while suffering from a bloat that afflicts much of King's writing from this period (it clocks up more than 1,000 pages). Like *Salem's Lot* and *The Stand*, *It* was originally considered too much of a doorstop to be suitable for a feature film – the unsatisfactory movie of Peter Straub's *Ghost Story* in 1982 served as an example of how outstanding material in this vein could go awry. So *It* became a 1990 TV miniseries directed by Tommy Lee Wallace, with Tim Curry memorable as archetypal evil clown Pennywise, the 'It' of the title.

Just as Pennywise returns to terrorise the Maine town of Derry every 27 years, so King properties come around again, put on fresh fright masks and set out to scare new generations. Developed by director Cary Fukunaga (*True Detective*), who shares a screenplay credit with Chase Palmer and Gary Dauberman, this new Iteration is crafted by director Andy Muschietti (of *Mama*) as an expert succession of non-sequitur spook scenes in which kids are confronted by exaggerated forms of their worst nightmares – a painting of a twisted woman comes to life to pursue Jewish Stan, a shambling leper drools over hypochondriac Eddie, and so on – until they band together to venture into the underworld and put a stop to the clown. The end credits amend the title to *It: Chapter One*, because this adapts only the flashback sections of the novel. Ironically, the childhood golden age of the protagonists is now shifted from the 1950s to a few years after the publication of the book, and rock 'n' roll and *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* are replaced by New Kids on the Block and Freddy Krueger.

In tone, plot details and even the casting of Finn Wolfhard as one of the misfit 'Losers Club', this half-an-It has many parallels with the Netflix miniseries *Stranger Things*, which similarly evokes an Arcadian world of 1980s childhood defined by clunky videogames, bike rides out of *E.T.*, Walkman cassettes and satanic (or just plain ordinary) child abuse.

Muschietti is too intent on jump scares to conjure up (one swimming scene aside) the glow or whimsy with which King leavens the horrors, and copes with the repetitive

Some like *It* not: Finn Wolfhard

nature of what he can use of the plot by ramping up the grotesquerie even for the non-supernatural menaces. Bill Skarsgård's rabbit-toothed, merry malevolence works best without CGI augmentation, though Pennywise is impressive when swollen to giant size. However, regular folks – whether influenced by It or not – can be even more terrifying, such as the junior heroine's incest-minded father, Eddie's swollen Munchausen-Syndrome-by-proxy mom or the jittery psychopathic school bully who becomes Pennywise's most devoted (but fairly useless) acolyte.

Saved for *Chapter Two* is the meat of the story, when the adult Losers – Richie foresees that by 2016 he'll be 40 and living as far away from Derry as possible – get back together *Big Chill* fashion to take one last swing at the monster. Without even the trace of a frame story like the one provided by Richard Dreyfuss at a word processor in *Stand by Me*, this half of *It* does seem like an extended set-up for a payoff delayed until the next film – and, at 135 minutes, it's still among the longest theatrically released American horror films on record. This *It* feels a little too much like pastiche, with its window on to an 80s informed by King as much as any other creator but a little further along the path to cartoonishness than the novel or the TV miniseries. S

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Roy Lee
Dan Lin
Seth Grahame-Smith
David Katzenberg
Barbara Muschietti
**Screenplay**
Chase Palmer
Cary Fukunaga
Gary Dauberman
Based on the novel by Stephen King
**Director of Photography**
Chung-Hoon Chung
**Edited by**
Jason Ballantine
**Production Designer**
Claude Paré
**Music**
Benjamin Wallfisch
**Sound Mixer**
Glen Gauthier
**Costumes Designed by**
Janie Bryant

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**Production Companies**
New Line Cinema presents in association with RatPac-Dune Entertainment a Vertigo Entertainment/Lin Pictures/KatzSmith production
A film by Andy Muschietti
**Executive Producers**
Dave Neustadter
Walter Hamada
Richard Brener
Toby Emmerich
Marty P. Ewing
Doug Davison
Jon Silk
Niija Kuykendall

**Cast**
**Jaeden Lieberher**
Bill Denbrough
**Bill Skarsgård**
Pennywise
**Finn Wolfhard**
Richie Tozier
**Jack Dylan Grazer**
Eddie Kaspbrak
**Sophia Lillis**
Beverly Marsh
**Jeremy Ray Taylor**
Ben Hanscom
**Wyatt Oleff**
Stan Uris
**Chosen Jacobs**
Mike Hanlon
**Nicholas Hamilton**
Henry Bowers
**Jackson Robert Scott**
Georgie Denbrough

**In Colour**
**[2.35:1]**

**Distributor**
Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

End titles title
**It Chapter One**

**Derry, Maine, 1988. Young Georgie Denbrough is lured to a storm drain and snatched by an ancient evil being that visits the small town every 27 years. It takes forms that relate to whatever its victims fear most – but often appears as Pennywise the Dancing Clown. Several other children go missing.**

**The following summer, a band of teens known as the Losers Club – Ben, Beverly, Mike, Stan, Eddie, Richie and Georgie's older brother Bill – are singled out by Pennywise, who appears and taunts them. Adults ignore the situation, so the Losers Club venture into the storm drains to confront Pennywise, defeating him through collective action – though it seems bound to return in 2016.**

# Jungle

Australia/United Kingdom/Colombia 2017
Director: Greg McLean
Certificate 15 115m 29s

**Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson**

The difficulty for *Jungle*, based on a memoir by entrepreneur Yossi Ghinsberg, is the element of surprise. The film would not exist, nor would the book itself, if young Yossi had not encountered trouble on his hike through the Bolivian jungle in 1981. Likewise, his memoir's existence is proof, before we set out, that after all he survived his ordeal. It is also very probable, in this particular scenario, that the most interesting stories belong to the people who didn't survive to tell them.

Faced with this dilemma, *Jungle*, directed by Australian horror specialist Greg McLean, wavers between two poles: should it be a gruesome thriller or an uplifting tale of hope and survival against the odds? The result is an action film rich in icky gore and occasional scares, which ultimately opts for the comfort of schmaltz. Daniel Radcliffe, previously seen far better fitted out for the wilderness as a multifunctional corpse in *Swiss Army Man* (2016), plays Yossi, who chums up with Marcus (Joel Jackson), a sweet schoolteacher, and Kevin (Alex Russell), an arrogant photographer, on a gap-year hike in the Bolivian rainforest. Charismatic adventurer Karl (Thomas Kretschmann) encourages them to leave the beaten path and follow him on a trek into the heart of the jungle. En route, the friends fall out and separate, and Yossi is stranded in the jungle for weeks, alone, half-starved and beset by hallucinations.

*Jungle* has two trump cards. One is the sumptuous Bolivian landscape, though frequent cutaways to the scenery or the exotic wildlife substantially dilute the tension. The best thing here is Radcliffe's riveting portrayal of Yossi. Screaming into the undergrowth, warding off a jaguar with an aerosol and a lighter, steeling himself to embrace a tree covered in fire ants or chewing on unmentionable bush food, Radcliffe is believably both terrified and perversely

**Take a hike: Daniel Radcliffe**

sustained by the idea that, having made it this far, he must be the "luckiest man on earth". His performance far better conveys Yossi's madness and despair during his weeks of isolation than do the tacky hallucination sequences (fantasies of a big Vegas win or a burger-bar blowout, a sexy native woman or a family-dinner flashback). Although this is surely the latest in a long line of roles intended to distance Radcliffe from a certain famous franchise, it's the sorrowful blue eyes of a neglected schoolboy that pierce the gloom – even when Yossi is neck-deep in a bog, or excavating worms from his own head wound.

Among his fellow hikers, Jackson is very effective as Marcus, the weakest and most sympathetic of the group. Meanwhile Kretschmann – although his back catalogue of Nazis suits a character who calls humans a "cancer" – makes Karl a subdued villain, perhaps so as not to distract from Yossi's storyline.

McLean, the auteur of the *Wolf Creek* franchise, in which an Outback villain terrorises backpackers, would perhaps have been more at ease following Karl and his victim on an imagined death trek than directing this memoir-thriller, which condones rather than warns against macho tourist folly. S

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Greg McLean
Dana Lustig
Gary Hamilton
Mike Gabrawy
Todd Fellman
**Written by**
Justin Monjo
Based on the book by Yossi Ghinsberg
**Director of Photography**
Stefan Duscio
**Film Editor**
Sean Lahiff
**Production Designer**
Matt Putland
**Composer**
Johnny Klimek
**Sound Recordist**
Craig Walmsley
**Costume Designer**
Vanessa Loh

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**Production Companies**
Screen Australia, Dana Lustig Productions & Hamilton Entertainment present a Storybridge Films and Emu Creek Pictures production in association with Screen Queensland, Melbourne International Film Festival Premiere Fund and Babber Films
A Greg McLean film
Shot with the support of the Colombian Film Commission
Participated in the Colombian Rebate Program
With the assistance of Film Victoria
Financed with the assistance of Story Bridge Films and Marshalls + Dent, Soundfirm
Produced by Babber Films
Produced with the financial assistance of the Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) Premiere Fund
Supported by the State Government of Victoria, Australia
Developed, produced and post-produced with the assistance of Screen Queensland
Principal Development and Production Investor: Screen Australia
**Executive Producers**
Jeff Harrison
Joan Peters
Mark Lazarus
Randy Simon
Yossi Ghinsberg
Jay Zohar Rapaport
Michal Rapaport
Berry Meyerowitz
Lawrence Greenberg

**Cast**
**Daniel Radcliffe**
Yossi Ghinsberg
**Thomas Kretschmann**
Karl
**Alex Russell**
Kevin
**Joel Jackson**
Marcus
**Yasmin Kassim**
Kina
**Luis Jose Lopez**
Tico
**Lily Sullivan**
Amie

**In Colour**
**[2.35:1]**

**Distributor**
Signature Entertainment

**Bolivia, early 1980s. Young Yossi Ghinsberg is on his gap year following national service. He meets Marcus, a schoolteacher, and Kevin, a successful photographer, and they team up to hike to Machu Picchu. In La Paz, however, Yossi encounters Karl, an Austrian adventurer who tempts him with a trip into an uncharted area of the jungle. Though Marcus is reluctant, they agree to the new hike, with Karl as their guide. In the jungle, Karl becomes aggressive, the friends bicker and Marcus struggles to keep up due to his injured feet. The men attempt to travel via raft, but Karl and Kevin fight when they hit the rapids. Karl says he is going home with or without the others, but won't travel by raft. It is decided that Marcus and Karl will make the shorter trip home by foot, while Yossi and Kevin will continue to explore, taking the raft downriver. However, they hit a rock and are separated. Yossi hikes first to the nearest settlement, but discovering the camp has been destroyed, he pushes on to Rurrenabaque, several days' hike away. He is injured and struggles to navigate or stay lucid. Kevin is rescued and sets out to find Yossi. After 19 days in the jungle, Yossi is rescued by Kevin, who brings him to Rurrenabaque. A caption tells us that Karl was a wanted man, and that neither he nor Marcus was ever seen again.**

# Kingsman The Golden Circle

USA/United Kingdom 2017
Director: Matthew Vaughn
Certificate 15 140m 49s

**Reviewed by Henry K. Miller**

In the first *Kingsman* (2015), a bad film to be sure but not as bad as this one, superspy Colin Firth and supervillain Samuel L. Jackson talk old Bonds: both of them prefer the earlier, less self-serious ones. Like his old partner-in-crime-movies Guy Ritchie, who in the same year released *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, director Matthew Vaughn seemed to be auditioning for the big show. Ritchie got the look and the sound – 1960s pastiche – and much else right; Vaughn and screenwriter Jane Goldman meanwhile delivered a noxious farrago of snobbery, crass 'edgy' humour and frenetic but unexciting CGI ultraviolence. *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* is much, much more of the same – two hours and 20 bombastic minutes of it, longer than almost every Bond except the most recent batch and just as devoid of laughs, though not for want of trying.

There are inevitable callbacks to the anal sex joke that ended the first film, but Goldman and Vaughn are not content simply to rest on their edgelord laurels. No, they have new and equally hilarious jokes to tell. The early reviews have made much of the 'fingering scene', in which our man Eggsy (Taron Egerton), undercover at Glastonbury, has to insert a tracking device inside Clara (Poppy Delevingne), the hippie girlfriend of former Kingsman trainee Charlie (Edward Holcroft) – but to my mind the weirdest part of the sequence comes a little earlier. Clara has invited her new acquaintance Eggsy back to her yurt, and before they've so much as brushed hands, he says he needs to go for a piss, and she says you could always just piss on me. I don't mean to kink-shame, but the timing is a little off, no? A bit forward, even in the circumstances. Just by mentioning it, though, I've already lost the game: Goldman and Vaughn have set out to wind up the prudes, and so they have – though the laughter in the public screening I attended was subdued, to say the least.

Having a bad patch: Colin Firth

Anyway, the distended running time masks a simple plot: Julianne Moore is Poppy Adams, an international drug kingpin who has put poison in her supply; millions will die without an antidote, which she will provide only if the US legalises drugs. The president is happy to see the world's addicts perish, but the Kingsmen team up with their American equivalents, the Statesmen, to avert disaster. For a franchise that is only two films old, there is a lot of dwelling on the past – Firth's character was killed in the first film, but is brought back to life here – and an ominous amount of 'world building' for the future. The American additions to the cast, with the partial exception of Moore, are awful, but it seems we're stuck with them. Apart from all this, Vaughn is apparently the first filmmaker who has been able to license Prince's music. After this cruel and degrading act of copro-necrophilia, one can hardly imagine what defilements he and Goldman will have to devise for their next showstopping taboo-buster.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Matthew Vaughn
David Reid
Adam Bohling
**Written by**
Jane Goldman
Matthew Vaughn
Based on the comic book *The Secret Service* by Mark Millar, Dave Gibbons
**Director of Photography**
George Richmond
**Edited by**
Eddie Hamilton
**Production Designer**
Darren Gilford
**Music Composed by**
Henry Jackman
Matthew Margeson
**Sound Supervisor and Sound Design**
Matthew Collinge
**Costume Designer**
Arianne Phillips
**Special Visual Effects and Animation**
Sony Pictures Imageworks
**Visual Effects**
Framestore
The Senate
BUF
MPC
**Key Stunt Co-ordinator**
Brad Allan
**Fight Co-ordinator**
Guillermo Grispo

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**Production Companies**
Twentieth Century Fox and Marv present
A Cloudy production
A Matthew Vaughn film
Made in association with TSG Entertainment
**Executive Producers**
Mark Millar
Dave Gibbons
Stephen Marks
Claudia Vaughn
Pierre Lagrange
**Film Extracts**
*Kingsman The Secret Service* (2015)

**Cast**
**Colin Firth**
Harry Hart
**Julianne Moore**
Poppy Adams
**Taron Egerton**
Gary Unwin, 'Eggsy', 'Galahad'
**Mark Strong**
Merlin
**Halle Berry**
Ginger Ale
**Pedro Pascal**
Whiskey
**Edward Holcroft**
Charles, Hesketh, Charlie
**Hanna Alström**
Princess Tilde
**Emily Watson**
Chief of Staff Fox
**Sophie Cookson**
Roxanne Morton, 'Roxy', 'Lancelot'
**Elton John**
himself
**Channing Tatum**
Tequila
**Jeff Bridges**
Champ

**Dolby Atmos**
**In Colour**
**[2.35:1]**

**Some screenings presented in 3D**

**Distributor**
20th Century Fox International (UK)

**The Kingsman organisation is virtually wiped out by a missile strike that misses only Eggsy and Merlin. Following the 'doomsday protocol', the pair fly to Kentucky to meet their American equivalents in the Statesman organisation. There they find Harry Hart, brought back to life after being shot in the head, but suffering from amnesia. The head of Statesman, Champagne, tells them he believes they were attacked by a group known as the Golden Circle. Merlin and his American opposite number Ginger Ale try to restore Harry's memory, while Eggsy, partnered with Whiskey, goes after turncoat ex-Kingsman trainee Charlie via his girlfriend Clara.**

**Millions of people across the world, including Statesman agent Tequila and Eggsy's girlfriend Tilde, are afflicted by blue rashes; this too is the work of the Golden Circle, which it transpires is a drug cartel run by Poppy Adams from a base in Cambodia. Poppy, who has contaminated the supply with poison, delivers an ultimatum: unless the US legalises drugs, she will not release the antidote. The president is content to see the world's addicts die, but Kingsman and Statesman go after Poppy. Eggsy, Whiskey and Harry, his memory having been partially restored, trace Charlie to a mountaintop base in Italy where the antidote is held. They fail to get a sample, and Harry kills Whiskey, believing him to be a double agent.**

**At length, Eggsy, Harry and Merlin travel to Cambodia; Merlin dies but the other two kill Poppy. They also kill Whiskey again, and release the antidote. Eggsy and Tilde marry, making Eggsy prince of Sweden.**

# Loving Vincent

Directors: Dorota Kobiela, Hugh Welchman
Certificate 12A 94m 34s

**Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson**

During his artistic career, between picking up a brush in his late twenties and his suicide in 1890, Vincent van Gogh painted about 900 canvases. The 100 artists who worked on the animated film *Loving Vincent* collaborated on a similar number of copies, creating 853 separate canvases in oil, then painting over and over them to form the thousands of frames needed to make the movie.

This uniquely tactile biopic-of-sorts is a remarkable achievement, the first oil-painted animated feature film, replicating van Gogh's world through his distinctive artistic style. We are surrounded by deep blues and mustardy yellows, with broken haloes of light around candle flames, stippled backgrounds, curved tendrils of cigarette smoke, heavy outlines and many, many starry nights. Slicks of paint skitter across the screen as famous van Gogh works stir into life and become settings for the characters to walk around in. The characters themselves were rotoscoped before being painted, so the recognisable features of screen actors (speaking in their own accents rather than mimicking French) meld with the visible brushstrokes of familiar van Gogh portraits. Saoirse Ronan as Marguerite Gachet has a cluster of crystalline blonde curls on her forehead, underlined in blue; the forked, full beard of Chris O'Dowd as Postmaster Roulin is dappled with stripes of grey, green and amber, which wriggle alarmingly as he speaks. The effect is vivid and fascinating, and enhanced by Clint Mansell's bewitching score – though it is also slightly puzzling, as the film is not constructed from van Gogh's perspective but from the conflicting reports of his friends and acquaintances in the wake of his death. In fact, the flashbacks featuring van Gogh himself are monochrome and rendered in a smoother, more photorealistic style.

The film's *Citizen Kane*-style plot structure has the Arles postmaster's son, Armand Roulin (Douglas Booth, whose raffish performance bursts through layers of yellow paint), attempting to deliver a final letter from van Gogh to his brother Theo, a year after the artist's death. Discovering from Paris art dealer Père Tanguy (John Sessions) that Theo is already dead, Armand travels to rural Auvers-sur-Oise, where van Gogh spent his last days. While he waits to hand the letter to local physician Dr Gachet (Jerome Flynn), Armand conducts an informal investigation into the artist's death. Although *Loving Vincent* is fictionalised, co-directors Dorota

Mellow yellow: Douglas Booth

Kobiela and Hugh Welchman strain to represent van Gogh faithfully. The film gives plenty of weight to the argument, made in a 2011 biography by Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, that his death may not have been suicide, as has generally been assumed, and one early scene was reshot following research published last year revealing that the artist really did remove his entire ear, and not just a chunk.

The glaze of oil daubs and swirls and the askew perspective of the van Gogh-inspired decor recall the distorted, artificial visuals of German expressionism. *Loving Vincent* is far from as histrionic as the films of that ilk, however: it is a reverent tribute to the artist's work, and a patient study of the depression that destroyed him.

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producers**
Hugh Welchman
Sean Bobbitt
Ivan Mactaggart
**Written by**
Dorota Kobiela
Hugh Welchman
Jacek Dehnel
**Directors of Photography**
Tristan Oliver
Lukasz Zal
**Editors**
Justyna Wierszynska
Dorota Kobiela
**Production Designer**
Matthew Button
**Composer**
Clint Mansell
**Production Sound Mixer**
Clive Copland
**Costume Designer**
Dorota Roqueplo
**Head of Painting**
Piotr Dominiak

**Production Companies**
Good Deed Entertainment & RBF Productions present in association with Silver Reel, Sevenex Capital Partners, Polish Film Institute, Doha Film Institute, City of Wroclaw a BreakThru Films & Trademark Films production
Co-producers: City of Wroclaw, Odra-Film/The Lower Silesian Film Fund, CeTA
With the support of the Polish Film Institute, Doha Film Institute, MEDIA, Unibail-Rodamco
**Executive Producers**
Claudia Bluemhuber
Gerd Schepers
Ian Hutchinson
Charlotte Ubben
Laurie Ubben
Edward Noeltner
David Parfitt

**Cast**
**Douglas Booth**
Armand Roulin
**Robert Gulaczyk**
Vincent van Gogh
**Eleanor Tomlinson**
Adeline Ravoux
**Jerome Flynn**
Doctor Gachet
**Saoirse Ronan**
Marguerite Gachet
**Chris O'Dowd**
Joseph Roulin, postman
**John Sessions**
Pere Tanguy
**Aidan Turner**
boatman
**Helen McCrory**
Louise Chevalier

**In Colour**
**[1.33:1]**

**Distributor**
Altitude Film Entertainment

**Arles, 1891, a year after the suicide of the painter Vincent van Gogh. Postmaster Roulin asks his son Armand to deliver one last letter from the artist to his brother Theo, in Paris. When he reaches the capital, Armand discovers that Theo is also dead. Following a tip from van Gogh's paint supplier, Armand goes to Auvers, the suburb where the artist spent his final weeks. Armand's plan is to visit Dr Gachet, who treated van Gogh and was apparently very close to him, in the hope that he will have an address for Theo's widow. He spends a few days in Auvers while he waits to see the doctor. During this time, he is given conflicting reports of van Gogh's life and death, from the innkeeper's daughter, Gachet's daughter and his housekeeper, a boatman, a thatcher and a second doctor, who is convinced that the death was not in fact a suicide. Armand learns that van Gogh was seeing Gachet's daughter, but that she broke off with him, that he had argued with both Theo and Gachet and also that he was bullied by local teenagers – it seems probable he was shot by one of them. Gachet and his daughter both feel guilty about Vincent's unhappiness. The doctor explains to Armand that whether he committed suicide or not, the artist wanted to die. Gachet promises to give the letter to Jo, Theo's widow.**

**In Arles, months later, the Roulins receive news from Jo, thanking them for the letter.**

# The Merciless

Director: Byung Sung-hyun

**Reviewed by Trevor Johnston**

There is, it has to be said, some very nasty stuff involving a frying pan, hot oil and a tattooed victim, but for the most part this Korean crime drama majors around steely, concentrated, sustained deception. Pretty-boy prisoner Hyun-su's criminal background appears to check out as he begins to inveigle himself into the affairs of scary gangland top dog Jae-ho, who more or less runs the show inside the penitentiary – though by then we already know that the junior partner is by no means the man he claims to be. Difficult to say much more without giving away a twist that writer-director Byung Sung-hyun's third feature keeps up its sleeve for a while, but what's fascinating here is the way the story allows Hyun-su to reveal his identity to the much feared Jae-ho and, instead of getting offed in some horrible fashion for his pains, to enter into a bond of complicity that enables the latter to invite him into his boss's organisation.

"Trust the circumstances, not the person," is Jae-ho's mantra, a crucial statement of intent in a sinuously plotted affair, which shifts back and forth in time, pivots on who knows what and when, yet fundamentally harks back to the old *Vertigo* gambit of uncovering the big twist halfway through so that the intrigue is actually about how the characters deal with the consequences. There's a sense that the characters are competing for best poker face, since virtually everyone involved is trying to 'play' someone else. But while the territory has obviously been well mined before by such genre touchstones as Bill Duke's *Deep Cover* (1992) and the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy (2002-03), Byung's notion that the trust between the two central characters outweighs whatever other (let's say) institutional loyalties they're bound by works both as arrestingly skewed moral shading and a viable plot device.

Formally, Byung isn't out to deliver the rapid-fire cutting and digitally assisted mayhem seen in various Korean action pictures (*The Villainess* being a recent example), and notwithstanding a showy penchant for diagrammatic aerial views, the *mise en scène* prefers straightforward readability over shaky-cam sleight of hand. Such poise is tenable for the most part because of the sheer presence of his cast, with industry veteran Sul Kyung-gu (most often seen as a sturdy authority figure) a standout, cutting loose as Jae-ho, the killer the other killers are scared of, hiding a capacity for extreme brutality behind a mask of inscrutability. It's a shame that Yim Si-wan, as Hyun-su, isn't quite so convincingly badass, possibly because he looks as if he's about to audition for a boy band (and is indeed a graduate of K-pop headliners ZE:A), though it's clearly a plum role in a film with evident remake potential. There's sturdy conflict and structure underpinning what proves a slightly overextended second half (which takes too long to decide who's going to crumble first). With the precedent of *The Departed* (2006) in mind, much of this would evidently transfer to an American context relatively intact. That said, the sinister role of the merciless police chief might not carry quite the same ideological charge, given the authoritarian excesses lurking within South Korea's recent past.

Korea criminal: Yim Si-wan

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producers**
Michelle Kwon
Simon Lee
Park Ji-sung
An Eun-mi
Yi Jin-hee
**Screenplay**
Byung Sung-hyun
Kim Min-soo
**Director of Photography**
Cho Hyoung-rae
**Editors**
Kim Sang-bum
Kim Jae-bum
**Production Designer**
Han Ah-rum
**Music**
Kim Hong-jip
Lee Jin-hee
**Action Choreography**
Hur Myung-hang

**Production Companies**
CJ Entertainment, Pollux Barunson, Real Passion Selection present a CJ Entertainment, Pollux Barunson production
**Executive Producers**
Miky Lee
Jeong Tae-sung

**Cast**
**Sul Kyung-gu**
Jae-ho
**Yim Si-wan**
Hyun-su
**Kim Hie-won**
Ko Byung-gab
**Jeon Hye-jin**
Cheon In-sook
**Lee Kyoung-young**
Chairman Ko Bung-chul
**Heo Jun-ho**
Kim Sung-han
**Jang In-sub**
Min-chul
**Kim Sung-oh**
Jung Seung-pil
**Choi Byung-mo**
Captain Choi
**Kim Ji-hoon**
Jung-sik

**In Colour**
**[2.35:1]**
**Subtitles**
South Korean theatrical title
**Boolhandang: Nabbeun Nomdeului Sesang**

**Busan, South Korea, present day. Feared gangster Jae-ho, right-hand man to major narcotics magnate Ko, greets his acolyte Hyun-su on release from the prison where they served time together.**

**Flashbacks reveal their backstory. Hyun-su was Jae-ho's trusted ally in prison, running a lucrative trade in illicit cigarettes and edging out rival Sung-han. However, Hyun-su is an undercover police officer, and Sung-han has been sent by Ko to kill the ambitious Jae-ho. Ko's nephew Byung-gap has discovered Hyun-su's identity, but Jae-ho continues to lure Hyun-su into his orbit, facilitating the latter's day release after his beloved mother is killed in a hit-and-run accident. Hyun-su confesses his true identity to Jae-ho, who invites him to join Ko's organisation on the basis that they share a bond of trust. After his release, Hyun-su continues secretly reporting to the police chief, who knows Jae-ho is negotiating a secret deal with Russian gangsters to use Ko's legitimate fish-import business as a cover for drug imports. Hyun-su sets up a fake rendezvous, leaving the police red-faced when their raid proves fruitless. In response, the chief shows Hyun-su video evidence revealing that it was Jae-ho who killed his mother. Hyun-su sets up a trap to corner Jae-ho, who tells him he was wrong to trust him. Hyun-su kills Jae-ho for murdering his mother; he also kills the police chief for keeping it from him.**

# The Meyerowitz Stories (New and Selected)

USA 2017
Director: Noah Baumbach

**Reviewed by Trevor Johnston**

Noah Baumbach's territory is exploring how the terminally self-involved create havoc for all those around them. Whether it's the sons thrown into turmoil by their parents' divorce in *The Squid and the Whale* (2005), the toxic sister spreading discord and disdain in *Margot at the Wedding* (2007) or the eponymous *Greenberg* (2010) breaking up the band on the cusp of fame, Baumbach really has a handle on life's collateral damage. In this instance, at the centre of the vortex is Dustin Hoffman's also-ran abstract sculptor Harold Meyerowitz, and since he's in his seventies, that can only mean that his offspring have been through decades of festering exasperation.

It's a brilliant performance – perhaps Hoffman's best since *Rain Man* (1988) – as minor artist Harold bristles constantly at not having had the career he believes was his due. He's utterly unruffled in dishing out thoughtlessly hurtful comments to his nearest and dearest, yet at the same time Hoffman also subtly hints at a gnawing self-doubt that's never going to leave this old man. Where *Margot* and *Greenberg* took their dysfunctional central characters on a journey towards limited self-knowledge, it's clearly too late for Harold, so the story threads here are focused mainly on his two sons by different marriages, each of them trying to air their grievances at least, even if ultimate resolution is an unlikely prospect.

While that sounds like a whole lot of hurt to accommodate, in practice the film leavens the gloom by calling on the assured comedic skills of Ben Stiller (financial whizz who feels undervalued by dad) and Adam Sandler (amiable wastrel, ditto) as Matthew and Danny, the half-brothers not altogether easy in each other's company. Both of them play to their strengths, while also going that bit further in adding emotional richness to the ensemble: Stiller always does uptight to a T, yet here there's something poignant in his seeking paternal approval by claiming that his boyhood play inspired one of Harold's pieces. Sanders, in turn, practised at playing the loveable chump, also shows how paternal neglect has eaten away at Danny's self-confidence, so that he let an evident musical talent essentially go to waste. In the story's darkest moment, Danny's sister Jean (Elizabeth Marvel, another strong contribution) reveals how she was molested as a teenager by a family friend and was told by her dad not to make a fuss, something that causes undeniable shock, before the two half-brothers rather laughably trash the perpetrator's car in a hospital parking lot.

From pain to fairly broad hijinks, the film covers quite a spectrum, yet the writing is so assured, Baumbach so richly invested in the deep-pile truthfulness of the Meyerowitz universe, that it never seems patched together. If anything, he almost makes it look too easy. The quality of the performances, the unobtrusive technique that serves the material without bringing too much attention to itself, the sense that he's just so at home with this upscale New York art-world milieu: together these deliver the sort of pleasurable, all-good viewing experience we once associated with Woody Allen.

Following the threads of the different siblings creates slight echoes of *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986), say, but the sensibility is somewhat different, since these are glitchy, modern lives and Baumbach never pretends to have all the answers to their discontents. That said, he's never been one to let those discontents get the better of his characters, and between the weaving storylines a kind of shambling resilience emerges, which feels earned without getting too saccharine. Moreover, having given today's young people a bit of a going-over in *While We're Young* (2014), he's sanguine here about the prospect of Danny's charming daughter Eliza (Grace Van Patten) breaking out of the Meyerowitz cycle of self-laceration – even if it means having some fun with the gaucherie of her tyro film-school offerings, throwing sex and symbolism enthusiastically on screen in the adventures of 'Pagina Man'.

Actually, you feel that Baumbach could have wandered off into another movie about Eliza's coming of age, and if there is a slight problem with *The Meyerowitz Stories*, it's a surfeit of engaging characters – we don't quite get enough of Emma Thompson as Hoffman's hilariously vague, somewhat sozzled spouse, or the marvellous Rebecca Miller as another artist's daughter and potential love interest for plucky Danny. Baumbach ultimately is so intrigued by his creation – and who wouldn't be? – that he can't quite pull himself away, running over-length, and perhaps delivering several good endings when he could have set the seal on an otherwise admirable effort with a single great one.

Grievance procedures: Ben Stiller, Dustin Hoffman

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Scott Rudin
Noah Baumbach
Lila Yacoub
Eli Bush
**Written by**
Noah Baumbach
**Director of Photography**
Robbie Ryan
**Editor**
Jennifer Lame

**Production Designer**
Gerald Sullivan
**Music Composed and Performed by**
Randy Newman
**Re-recording Mixer**
Paul Hsu
**Costume Designer**
Joseph G. Aulisi

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**Production Companies**
A Netflix original film in association with IAC Films
A film by Noah Baumbach
**Film Extracts**
*Legal Eagles* (1986)
*The Awful Truth* (1937)
*Sex Tape* (2014)

**Cast**
**Adam Sandler** Danny Meyerowitz
**Ben Stiller** Matthew Meyerowitz
**Dustin Hoffman** Harold Meyerowitz
**Emma Thompson** Maureen
**Elizabeth Marvel** Jean Meyerowitz
**Grace Van Patten** Eliza
**Candice Bergen** Julia
**Adam Driver** Randy
**Judd Hirsch** L.J. Shapiro
**Rebecca Miller** Loretta Shapiro
**Matthew Shear** Gabe

**In Colour [1.85:1]**

**Distributor**
Netflix

**New York, present day. Abstract sculptor Harold Meyerowitz continues working into old age, ignoring the feeling that critical approval has passed him by. Danny, his son from his first marriage, has made little of his own songwriting talent, but is proud of his daughter Eliza, about to attend film school. Like his sister Jean, Danny feels somewhat overshadowed in his father's affections by Matthew, the son from Harold's second marriage, now an LA-based wealth manager and himself feeling that his father doesn't respect his financial success. Attending a glittering museum opening for old friend and fellow sculptor L.J. Shapiro leaves Harold even more embittered, so Danny and Harold's current wife Maureen try to persuade him to participate in a group show at Bard College, where he taught for many years. Before the opening, however, Harold suffers an embolism that leaves him hospitalised, bringing the family together to compare old grievances. Danny and Matthew are shocked when Jean reveals being abused during adolescence by a family friend, only for their father to shrug it off; Danny is aggrieved that Matthew has negotiated the sale of their father's townhouse, including his collected works, at a knockdown price. The two men come to blows, and Matthew acknowledges guilt during an anguished speech at the show's private view. Harold recovers, and is as unbearable as ever, but the siblings have benefited from clearing the air. Eliza discovers that an artwork of Harold's, long thought to be lost, is in fact in storage at the Whitney Museum.**

# mother!

USA 2017
Director: Darren Aronofsky
Certificate 18 120m 54s

**Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton**

*mother!* is a preposterous, self-important and utterly crass movie, of the sort I've come to expect from writer/director Darren Aronofsky. It is also a virtuoso performance that flexes more filmmaking muscle than almost anything else that's appeared in a multiplex over the course of this woebegone year, a film that establishes a tone of pervasive anxiety, then sets about the task of gathering narrative kindling to be set alight in a blowout *Walpurgisnacht*.

Jennifer Lawrence, playing the young bride of a pretentious and somewhat older famous poet, is positioned at the movie's centre, though usually a semi-mute witness to action in the house that she keeps and cares for. Save for two bookending scenes, the narrative is entirely filtered through her eyes; she is very often tracked in moving, choreographed close-ups that recall Aronofsky's treatment of Mickey Rourke in *The Wrestler* (2008); and more than once the camera's point of view is aligned intimately with her own, as when she looks down in the shower at the swell of her pregnant stomach. The poet is played by Javier Bardem, with his large, noble head made for a flyleaf photo – I suspect the movie is having fun with the very absurdity of the idea of a 'famous poet' in the 21st century, and the role seems to be conceived as a combination of Khalil Gibran and David Koresh.

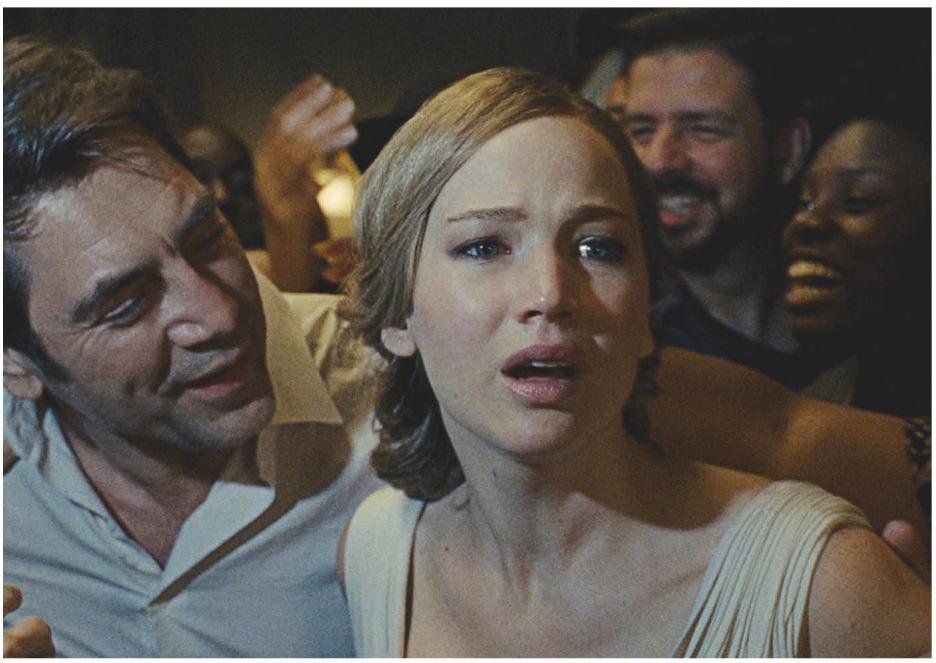
As the film begins, the couple live together in isolation in a massive country home, but they receive an unexpected visitor in the form of a doctor (Ed Harris) and his wife (Michelle Pfeiffer), who take an invitation to spend the night as an opening to act as if they own the place – much to the chagrin of Lawrence's flustered but dauntlessly deferential wife. (Proper names are eschewed here, recalling the parable form popular in silent cinema.)

*mother!* is structured as a kind of death by a thousand impositions, the impact of each seen registering in Lawrence's first flustered, then panic-stricken expression. (The score, by Jóhann Jóhannsson, frequently cedes to the minutely detailed sound design, in which every thump and creak of the old house can be acutely, agitatingly felt.) After a brief abatement following the news of the woman's pregnancy, the litany of infringements is resumed with fresh force, and the movie throws off any remaining tethers connecting it to realism – of which there weren't many to begin with – as the house becomes a literal battle zone, a manifestation of the near impossibility of cloistering oneself away from images of chaos and suffering in the era of the unending, fear-fuelled news cycle.

As events take a turn for the apocalyptic, we are treated to a cannibalistic parody of the Eucharistic liturgy. The union between the Lawrence character and her celebrity poet husband plays out as a parable of creative vampirism, the preening Great Man finally unmasked as a kind of immortal Bluebeard, burning his way through muses while himself emerging unscathed. (The fact that the 48-year-old Aronofsky is currently romantically involved with the 27-year-old Lawrence offers fuel for *film à clef* speculation.)

It doesn't take a great deal of exegesis to render up these ideas. Fortunately, the sheer presence of the movie gives it a power that transcends its use as a vehicle for thematic delivery. While Aronofsky's bona fides as a technician have never been in doubt, the same can't be said of the material he's chosen put his skill to. However, in *mother!* he has turned in the single most sustained performance of his career. In his second-best movie, *The Wrestler*, produced in a chastened moment after the public rejection of *The Fountain* (2006), Aronofsky seemed to be suppressing his more baroque impulses to work in something close to the style of the Dardennes. Here, the influence of Roman Polanski's 'Apartment Trilogy' can be felt in the way he gradually ratchets up the level of persecutory disquiet, and the mounting claustrophobia owes something to Ionesco's 1955 play *The New Tenant*. But in its final crescendo of masterfully orchestrated chaos, *mother!* becomes something significantly more than the work of a gifted movie-brat mimic.

It's impossible to say if this accomplishment signifies a levelling up for Aronofsky or only the classic case of the stopped clock that's right twice a day. But with this brash, ludicrous, bludgeoning film he has made a work that embodies the pervasive feeling that no domestic fortifications can hold the day against what's on the horizon. It is an easy mark for mockery, and the overwhelming temptation to laugh it off as more bad taste run amok is understandable – for it contains a true sense of the awful, and that is always more comforting to ignore.



A touch of crass: Javier Bardem, Jennifer Lawrence

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Scott Franklin
Ari Handel
**Written by**
Darren Aronofsky
**Director of Photography**
Matthew Libatique
**Edited by**
Andrew Weisblum
**Production Designer**
Philip Messina
**Music and Sound Consultant**
Jóhann Jóhannsson
**Sound Designer**
Craig Henighan
**Costume Designer**
Danny Glicker
**Visual Effects and Animation**
Industrial Light & Magic
**Visual Effects**
Raynault VFX
Mr. X Gotham
Hybride
**Stunt Co-ordinator**
Marc Désourdy

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**Production Companies**
Paramount Pictures presents a Protozoa production
A film by Darren Aronofsky
This production participated in the New York State Governor's Office of Motion Picture and Television Development post production credit program
**Executive Producers**
Jeff Waxman
Josh Stern
Mark Heyman

### Cast

**Jennifer Lawrence**
mother
**Javier Bardem**
Him
**Ed Harris**
man
**Michelle Pfeiffer**
woman
**Brian Gleeson**
younger brother
**Domhnall Gleeson**
oldest son
**Stephen McHattie**
zealot
**Kristen Wiig**
herald

**Dolby Digital**
**In Colour**
**[2.35:1]**

**Distributor**
Paramount Pictures UK

**A remote country home, present day. A young woman, first seen awakening alone in bed, labours to restore the fire-damaged house that belongs to her husband, an older poet who is suffering from writer's block. A middle-aged doctor calls at the house, saying that he is taking a job in the area and is looking for lodgings. After the poet invites the doctor to spend the night, the latter is joined by his wife. It transpires that the doctor is a fan of the poet, his visit a conspiracy to meet his hero before he dies from a long illness. Business concerning the doctor's impending death brings his two sons to the house; they have a violent scuffle over his will and one of them is killed. Left alone to clean up after an impromptu wake, the young woman confronts her husband about his negligence; their squabble ends in violent lovemaking. She wakes the following morning convinced that she's pregnant. The news inspires her husband to a creative outburst.**

**Months later, the poet has published a new book. An army of fans arrives and invades the couple's home. Amid the chaos, the young woman gives birth, only for her husband to sacrifice the child to his raving fans. She burns down the house and everyone inside, but her husband survives unscathed. He pulls the young woman's heart from her dying body, restoring the house to its former state of repair. In his bed, another young woman awakens.**

# The Mountain Between Us

USA 2017
Director: Hany Abu-Assad

**Reviewed by Adam Nayman**

It's a close call as to what would ultimately be more physically, emotionally and spiritually gruelling: surviving three weeks stranded without food or shelter in the snowy mountains of Colorado following a small-engine plane crash, or taking at all seriously Hany Abu-Assad's *The Mountain Between Us*. This is not to say that this lavishly produced, dramatically over-cranked survival thriller, starring two fabulously attractive movie stars shot almost exclusively in extreme close-up, is not entertaining. In fact, it is giddily, hilariously watchable. But the gap between what Abu-Assad, who has languished since his calling-card breakthrough *Paradise Now* in 2005, thinks he's doing with his Hollywood crossover move and the actual quality of the film itself is a bottomless chasm of clueless prestige moviemaking hubris.

"What brings you to Idaho?" queries Ben (Idris Elba) to Alex (Kate Winslet), a few minutes after meeting her in line at the Gem State's biggest airport, where a snowstorm has grounded all outgoing flights; as ice-breakers go, it's not quite on the level of "What's a pretty girl like you doing in a place like this?" Ben is a surgeon, Alex is a photojournalist, and they're both desperate to flee the Midwest (he for work, she for her wedding), so they contract a charter pilot (Beau Bridges) and take off into heavy weather. One ostentatious, CGI-assisted single-take crash sequence later, they're battered, bruised and completely cut off from civilisation.

Ever driven and impulsive (qualities right in Winslet's wheelhouse), Alex thinks they should seek help. Stoic, pragmatic Ben, whose defining characteristic is his steady hands, is willing to wait for the cavalry to come. The contrasts between these two characters' worldviews are blunt, obvious and tacitly sexist, since the script keeps reminding us that Alex's choices come weighted with dangerous consequences, and Ben literally saves her from harm at least three times. What's more insulting than the film's outdated gender politics, however, is its positively archaic, *Perils of Pauline*-esque dramaturgy, which keeps throwing obstacles at the protagonists every ten minutes (including, quite amusingly, a hungry mountain lion), while simultaneously laying the ground work for their tetchy co-dependency to melt into passionate attraction.

Who dares Winslet: Idris Elba

Which, oh boy, does it ever. Even if one accepts that *The Mountain Between Us* is going to go mushy – or indeed, that said mushiness is its reason for being – it's still hard to believe just how borderline-campy its romantic scenes are within its overall adventure-movie context. The issue is not so much that earnest, sincere, old-fashioned storytelling is helpless against cynical present-tense viewing practices as that Abu-Assad's own cynicism is so apparent: gifted with a big budget and the visibility of a splashy awards-season release, he'll happily sacrifice believability, nuance and common sense (as in a set piece involving a bear trap) in order to elicit any old emotion from his audience. He's so shameless that it's kind of amazing.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Peter Chernin
Jenno Topping
David Ready
**Screenplay**
Chris Weitz
J. Mills Goodloe
Based upon the book by Charles Martin
**Director of Photography**
Mandy Walker
**Edited by**
Lee Percy
**Production Designer**
Patrice Vermette
**Music**
Ramin Djawadi
**Sound Mixer**
Chris Duesterdiek
**Costume Designer**
Renée Ehrlich Kalfus

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**Production Companies**
Fox 2000 Pictures presents
A Chernin Entertainment production
Made in association with TSG Entertainment
**Executive Producers**
Becki Cross Trujillo
Fred Berger

**Cast**
**Kate Winslet**
Alex Martin
**Idris Elba**
Ben Bass
**Dermot Mulroney**
Mark
**Beau Bridges**
Walter

**In Colour**
**[2.35:1]**

**Distributor**
20th Century Fox International (UK)

**Idaho, present day. Surgeon Ben and photojournalist Alex are both trying to fly to Denver, but due to a snowstorm there are no flights. Alex, who is to be married the next day, suggests chartering a small plane, and Ben agrees. During the flight, the pilot suffers a stroke and the plane goes down, stranding Alex and Ben on the side of a mountain. Ben mends Alex's leg and establishes a shelter in the hull of the crashed plane, but Alex grows impatient and thinks they should seek help. They experience many narrow escapes on their subsequent journey, and grow close. They arrive at an abandoned house. Alex almost dies after falling through the ice into freezing water but Ben revives her; later on, he confides that his wife died from a brain tumour a few years earlier. They sleep together in the house and set out again into the snow. When Ben is caught in a bear trap near a logging camp, Alex finds help. Ben awakes in a hospital bed. Alex returns to New York and her fiancé. After avoiding her calls, Ben comes to see her. She tells him she didn't marry after all. They embrace.**

# My Pure Land

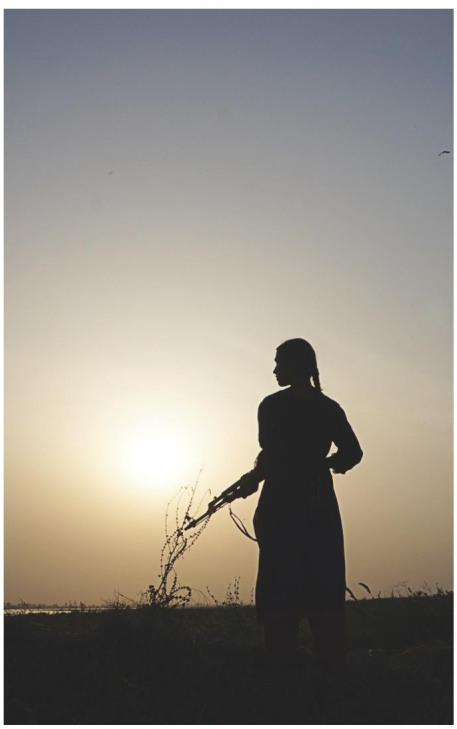
United Kingdom 2017
Director: Sarmad Masud
Certificate 15 97m 35s

**Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran**

There have been several examples of the 'feminist western', including *Johnny Guitar* (1954), *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993), *Bad Girls* (1994), *The Quick and the Dead* (1995) and *Gang of Roses* (2003), to name just a few. India has been well served in this regard, with *Phoolan Devi* (1985), *Sherni* (1988) and *Bandit Queen* (1994). *My Pure Land* is that rarity – a Pakistani feminist western. British-Pakistani director Sarmad Masud distils the ethos of the subgenre, marrying it to what remains an endemic issue in South Asia – siblings fighting over inherited land – and giving it the trappings of a classic siege western such as *Rio Bravo* (1959).

Unlike the films mentioned earlier, however, *My Pure Land* is not a horse opera, taking place instead in and around a house in rural Pakistan. The period is left deliberately vague – there is not a mobile phone in sight, and the vehicles could be from any time from the 1950s onwards. Though the dusty vistas and old-fashioned gunplay are classic western tropes, the film's protagonists are anything but. At the centre of it all are 18-year-old Nazo, her younger sister Saeda, their mother Waderi and Nazo's 20-year-old suitor Zulfiqar. They are trapped in the house, surrounded by militia armed to the teeth. Nazo's uncle Mehrban, who covets the property and is ready to take it by force, leads the enemy at the gates.

Masud and his editor Olly Stothert manage a tricky balancing act. They build up the tension inside the besieged house, as its occupants gradually run out of bullets, but they do not resolve it. The tension is relieved by flashbacks revealing the story behind the siege, centring on Nazo's father Khuda Baksh, an honest, self-made man who built the house with his own hands. At the same time these flashbacks paint a larger picture of a Pakistan where corruption among public servants is the norm rather than the exception. Indeed, the film's title is



Gun control: Suhaee Abro

deliberately ironic, as Pakistan translates as 'land of the pure' from Urdu. When the action returns to the house, the tension builds again, with Masud particularly well served by a steely central performance from Suhaee Abro as Nazo, also making her feature debut. The film is the UK's first Urdu entry in the Oscars' foreign language category, and Masud is clearly a British talent to watch.

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Bill Kenwright
**Written by**
Sarmad Masud
**Director of Photography**
Haider Zafar
**Edited by**
Olly Stothert
**Production Designer**
Caroline Bailey
**Original Score**
Tristan Cassel-Delavois
**Sound Design**
Vicente Villaescusa
**Costume Supervisor**
Kainat Ali Khosa

©My Pure Land Ltd
**Production Companies**
Bill Kenwright presents
**Executive Producers**
Naomi George
Sarmad Masud
Steve Potts

**Cast**
**Suhaee Abro**
Nazo
**Eman Malik**
Saeda
**Razia Malik**
Waderi
**Syed Tanveer Hussain**
Khuda Baksh, 'Baba'
**Atif Akhtar Bhatti**
Sikander
**Tayyab Ifzal**
Zulfiqar
**Ashen Murad**
Mehrban
**Sahib Ahmad**
Tariq
**Muhammed Safdar**
Safdar
**Muhammed Aslam**
Aslam
**Abdul Qadir**
wounded man, driver
**Salman Ahmed Khan**
Amir
**Malik Aslam**
police chief
**Abbas Ali**
bandit leader
**Ghulam Muhammed Kahn Naizi**
Ahmad

**In Colour**
**[2.35:1]**
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**
Bill Kenwright Films

**Rural Pakistan, an unspecified time. Eighteen-year-old Nazo, wielding an AK-47, stands with her mother Waderi outside the gates to their home, warning her uncle Mehrban and his armed henchmen not to step any closer. Mehrban claims that the land is rightfully his. Nazo and Waderi go back inside the property and lock the gates. Nazo, her sister Saeda and family friend Zulfiqar exchange fire with Mehrban and his men.**

**Between these gunfire exchanges, the film flashes back to the girls' childhood, when their father Khuda Baksh brings them up as boys and trains them in weaponry. He tells them that this is their land, and that they must protect it from Mehrban, who is in cahoots with the police. Khuda Baksh is thrown in jail and watches helplessly as his son Sikandar is brought in on a trumped-up charge, beaten and shot dead. Khuda Baksh falls ill and dies.**

**At the house, Nazo sneaks out and steals bullets and guns from Mehrban's car. Mehrban brings in more men and they surround the house as night falls. The firing continues and Zulfiqar is wounded. Nazo tells Zulfiqar that she will only marry him on certain conditions: that they live in her family house, and that she is allowed to study, work and travel. Zulfiqar agrees. With only three bullets left, Nazo prepares to shoot her mother, preferring death to dishonour. The following morning, a police officer arrives and asks the occupants of the house to leave peacefully. He is met with silence. Eventually, Nazo emerges and announces that they have no intention of leaving – the house is legally theirs.**

**End titles reveal that the film is based on a true story. Nazo and Zulfiqar are married and have four children, and the family remains in the house to this day.**

# Our Last Tango

Germany/Italy/Argentina 2015
Director: German Kral
Certificate 12A 84m 22s

**Reviewed by Maria Delgado**

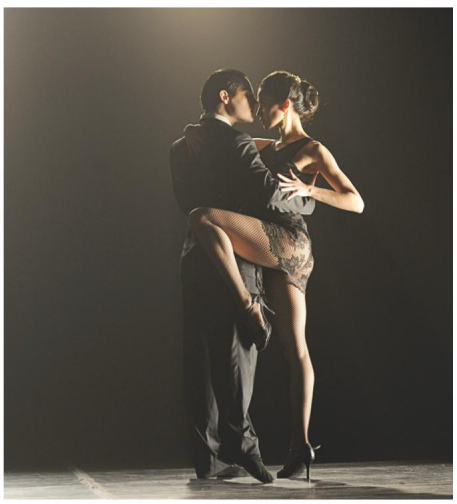
For tango aficionados across the globe, María Nieves Rego and Juan Carlos Copes *are* tango. While the popular imagination will forever have them coupled like Astaire and Rogers or Kelly and Charisse, German Kral's creative documentary is as much about the abyss between them as it is about their remarkable professional collaboration. Though archive footage and period photographs immortalise their partnership, *Our Last Tango* films the pair separately – a narrative conceit that allows each to tell their side of the story without coming into direct contact with the other. Carlos Saura famously wanted both to appear in his 1998 film *Tango*, but secured only Copes's participation. Here, however, it is Nieves who takes centre stage, gradually displacing Copes from the film's core as she guides the viewer through her life story. Copes may see himself as tango's great survivor, still dancing in his mid-eighties, but it is his former partner who emerges as the more daring and dazzling dancer, and the true protagonist of Kral's stylish film.

The talking-head interviews are ingeniously positioned alongside choreographed numbers recreating episodes recounted by the ex-partners. Shot in warm colours, the sequences are staged in knowingly theatrical environments – the *milongas*, theatres and clubs of Buenos Aires, film sets recreating the austere domestic environments in which Nieves grew up. The numbers – featuring two sets of dancers playing the ex-couple in youth and middle age – are both a mode of narrating Copes and Nieves's professional and personal relationship and a testament to the continued vibrancy of tango as an artform. Kral's camera follows the dancers' feet, sweeping across the floor to capture the energy of the slick, quick moves. As in Saura's *Carmen* (1983), the camera becomes a participant in the dance, allowing the viewer to experience the exhilarating thrill of live performance.

*Our Last Tango* is as much about ways of capturing creative practice on celluloid as it is about the broader historical narrative of Copes and Nieves. Layers of reflection are built in as Nieves both watches and directs the dancers recreating moments from her past and then engages with their questions. Perusing black-and-white photos of the couple or commenting on grainy Super-8 footage, the younger dancers offer a running commentary both on Copes and Nieves's technique and feats and on the broader love story with tango that anchors the film.

A sly political undercurrent runs through *Our Last Tango*. There is no discussion of Argentina's 1976-83 military dictatorship and its attempts to wipe out an artform that Nieves describes as "the joy of the poor", but the couple's escalating international touring during these difficult years, culminating in the 1980s Broadway hit *Tango Argentino*, allows the viewer to piece together the missing parts of the jigsaw. The poker-faced Copes is keen to inscribe himself in tango's history. His commercial eye – creating the first tango stage show – and disciplinary ethos point to a savvy entrepreneur, and indeed he still performs today, with his daughter Johana. Johana may claim to be a clone of Nieves but, watching the father and daughter's solid but uninspiring performance, the reality is far from it. The single-minded Copes, holding forth on his conservative gender politics, refers to Nieves as his Stradivarius and muse, but the footage reveals her speed, elegance and precision, most particularly in the tabletop dances that always terrified her.

Copes may have had the ambition and the vision but Nieves had the real artistic talent. Rarely without a cigarette in hand, she charms the viewer with her warmth, generosity of spirit and the heartfelt honesty with which she speaks about the pain caused by Copes's infidelities, the family formed with his second wife and his decision to drop her as his dance partner – "a dagger in my heart". *Our Last Tango* is ultimately a film about the survival of an artform, articulating the roles that Copes and Nieves played in that process and the personal cost of their journey.



**Out on a limb: Copes, Rego**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producers**
Nils Dünker
Dieter Horres
German Kral
**Written by**
German Kral
Daniel Speck
**Photography**
Jo Heim
Félix Monti
**Editor**
Ulrike Tortora
**Production Designer**
Matías Martínez
**Music**
Luis Borda
Sexteto Mayor
Gerd Baumann
**Sound**
Celeste Palma
**Costume Designer**
Giselle Peisojovich

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**Production Companies**
Lailaps Pictures, Horres Film & TV, German Kraal Filmproduktion present in co-production with Monogatari Films, Schubert International Film, Mateina Producciones, Westdeutscher Rundfunk
Sponsored by FilmFernsehFonds Bayern, Filmförderungsanstalt, Deutscher Filmförderfonds, Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales
**Executive Producers**
Wim Wenders
Rodrigo Furth
Jakob Abrahamsson

**Dolby Digital**
**In Colour**
**[1.85:1]**
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**
Celluloid Circus

German theatrical title
**Ein letzter Tango**

**Buenos Aires, the present. Celebrated tango dancers María Nieves Rego and Juan Carlos Copes, both in their eighties, are interviewed by a group of dancer-choreographers who are recreating moments from their lives as tango sequences. Interviewed separately, the couple recall how they met as teenagers; they reflect on their dance compatibility and tempestuous personal relationship, separation and subsequent professional split. These reflections are intercut with sequences in which the younger dancers play out their story.**

# The Ritual

United Kingdom/Canada 2017
Director: David Bruckner
Certificate 15 93m 58s

**Reviewed by Anton Bitel**

Regardless of where it ends, the starting point of David Bruckner's *The Ritual* is a tangled forest of grief, loss and guilt, from which its characters will struggle to emerge. As five one-time English university friends, now approaching middle age, discuss where they will spend a holiday weekend together, two of them – Luke (Rafe Spall) and Robert (Paul Reid) – enter an off-licence, where an armed robbery is taking place. Robert is clubbed to death before the eyes of Luke, who is cowering behind a shelf, too terrified to intervene. Significantly, although *The Ritual* is adapted from Adam Nevill's 2011 novel, this prefatory episode, with all-new character Robert and the dark psychological shadow it casts over all that follows, is entirely the invention of screenwriter Joe Barton.

Six months later, Luke, Hutch (Robert James-Collier), Phil (Arsher Ali) and Dom (Sam Troughton) are hiking in Sweden – the destination and activity that had been Robert's choice – and ritualistically saying farewell to their deceased friend. When the four decide to take a shortcut on their way back to civilisation, the film shifts into the more generic territories of deep, dark woods, spooky cabins, cultic communities and an ancient creature (brilliantly realised) that is a malign variant on the spirit of the forest from *Princess Mononoke* (1997). On their way, they pass an old abandoned combi van like the one from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), pagan sigils straight out of *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and a buried tent that is evidently all that remains of the sort of massacre familiar from a whole spree of campsite slashers. There is even, towards the end, a follow shot of an axe-wielding Luke as he limps along a side-lit path – which has clearly been modelled on a similar shot of cabin-fevered Jack Torrance, on his way to kill his loved ones, in the climactic sequence from Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980).

While conspicuously dressed in the trappings of horror, events here all have their provenance in that 'primal scene' of Robert's gruesome death, the Swedish hinterlands and primordial wilderness providing the arena in which the other four men work through the trauma that still haunts them. Luke, in particular, the closest of the four to that death and the most scarred by his experience, regularly has visions of the forest floor transforming into the bottle shop and restaging his sense of anguished helplessness.

Guilt edged: Arsher Ali, Sam Troughton

As the hikers go on their walk on the wild side, Bruckner, already a proven talent at mind melts with his work on *The Signal* (2007), offers viewers several interpretative routes through the undergrowth, without ever providing a clear map. Conventional horror and psychology trek along parallel paths, as Luke confronts either a Norse-ish god/monster or his own inner demons – or even suffering a Torrance-style breakdown and sacrificing his friends (who he knows all think he is a coward) to restore his own battered ego so that he can come out of a massacre a hero in his own mind. The harder viewers try to see the wood for the trees, the more likely they are to get lost, making *The Ritual* a seductively disorientating saga of recovery.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Richard Holmes
Jonathan Cavendish
**Screenplay**
Joe Barton
Based upon the novel by Adam Nevill
**Director of Photography**
Andrew Shulkind
**Editor**
Mark Towns
**Production Designer**
Adrian Curelea
**Music**
Ben Lovett
**Sound Recordist**
Marius Emil Stanescu
**Costume Designer**
Ana Ioneci

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**Production Companies**
Entertainment One presents an Imaginarium Studios, Entertainment One Features production
Developed with the support of Creative England via the BFI NET.WORK
**Executive Producers**
Andy Serkis
Will Tennant
Phil Robertson
Xavier Marchand

### Cast

**Rafe Spall**
Luke
**Arsher Ali**
Phil
**Robert James-Collier**
Hutch
**Sam Troughton**
Dom
**Paul Reid**
Robert

**In Colour**
**[2.00:1]**

**Distributor**
E1 Films

**England, the present. Friends Luke and Robert inadvertently walk into an off-licence while an armed robbery is in progress. Robert is clubbed to death before the eyes of the cowering Luke.**

**Six months later, on a weekend hike in northern Sweden, Luke, Hutch, Phil and Dom leave a commemorative shrine to their dead friend. When Dom injures his knee, they decide to take a shortcut through the forest. After finding an eviscerated deer hanging from the trees, they seek refuge from the rain in a cabin with a strange wooden effigy in its attic. After a night of very disturbing nightmares, the four continue their journey, shaken and reluctant to discuss their uncanny experiences. That night, as Luke dreams that the forest transforms into the off-licence, Hutch is snatched from his tent. Later, the other three men find his corpse, hanging and gutted. Something hunts them down, and hangs Phil. Luke and Dom flee to a cabin whose inhabitants hold them captive. Dom is bound to a stake outside, where a reindeer-like god impales him on a tree. Luke is offered eternal life if he will bow before the god, but instead fights it out with shotgun and axe, and escapes the forest.**

# 78/52

USA/France/United Kingdom 2017
Director: Alexandre O. Philippe
Certificate 15 91m 36s

**Reviewed by Adrian Martin**

The numbers have it: *78/52* and *Room 237* (on Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*) define the main tendencies of a new kind of essay documentary dedicated to examining cinema classics, part 'behind the scenes' supplement, part YouTube fan tribute, part glorified DVD audio commentary. Alexandre O. Philippe's *78/52*, devoted to the shower scene of *Psycho* (1960) and the build-up given to it by Alfred Hitchcock (both inside and outside the film), is a slick, occasionally intriguing, proudly nerdy affair.

Where the numbers obsession of Rodney Ascher's 2012 film *Room 237* triggered a delirium of fan interpretations of hidden symbolism, *78/52* – referring to 78 camera set-ups and 52 cuts – is fixed on the nuts and bolts of filmmaking craft. Useful insight into production and post-production mechanics is provided by Marli Renfro (Janet Leigh's body double) and by Stephen Rebello (author of the excellent *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho*). A string of editors (including Walter Murch, Amy E. Duddleston and Chris Innis) annotate the scene's cuts, rhythms and perspective-shifts. Hitchcock's granddaughter Tere Carrubba, Janet Leigh's daughter Jamie Lee Curtis and Anthony Perkins's son Osgood add personal testimonies. More than a few talking heads – including actor Illeana Douglas and composer Pepijn Caudron – will make you wonder why they are there at all.

Meanwhile the 'meaning' quotient of Hitchcock's film is briskly boiled down to, on the one hand, some very old-fashioned nuggets about "the randomness of life" and what Guillermo del Toro calls a "Biblical sense of doom and punishment"; and, on the other hand, a barrage of sociohistorical contexts somehow simply reflected on screen – everything from America's unpreparedness for World War II and nuclear-age anxieties to the changing roles of women in suburbia. This is the type of airy generality that does not get us terribly far inside *Psycho*.

Film-history students are advised to avoid proclaiming 'firsts', but *78/52* throws all such caution to the wind. I can accept Rebello's declaration that *Psycho* marks "the moment that signalled New American Cinema". But I was quickly annoyed by the protracted litany that it is also "the first modern expression of the female body under assault" (Karyn Kusama), "the first time in movies it wasn't safe to be in the movie theatre" (Peter Bogdanovich), a film that "changed the way films are exhibited" (Murch) and even "the first A-movie to deal with this kind of horror/trashy/tabloid stuff" (Bret Easton Ellis).

Such claims are easier to make if the scope of world cinema history is reduced to commercial American filmmaking. A telling moment arrives when writer-director Daniel Noah mocks "an obscure Czechoslovakian film" of his imagining that probably had a shower scene before Hitchcock – but, he strongly implies, who could care less about that? Though passing reference is made to Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* (1955), *Psycho* is served up to us as essentially a game-changing *tabula rasa*. Even something so evidently influential on Hitchcock as Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958) – the two films share a leading lady! – is ignored.

No one could doubt that Hitchcock is the artist most responsible for *Psycho*, but *78/52* reveals how blinkered a standard-operating auteurist premise can get. *Psycho*'s editor George Tomasini receives praise, but the decisive labour of screenwriter Joseph Stefano and storyboardist Saul Bass is underplayed, while the cinematographer and production designers are scarcely mentioned. Overloading this bias still further, Philippe encourages the typical speculations on Hitchcock's neuroses and obsessions (mother fixation, sexual repression, anti-Hollywood sentiment) and how they received virtually unmediated expression on screen – a dubious assumption, at best.

Philippe's rather cautious inclusion of critics and academics is revealing. Bill Krohn and David Thomson appear, but hardly get to utter more than two sentences apiece. What about Laura Mulvey, Raymond Bellour, Tania Modleski or many other candidates of a similar calibre? Instead, we get rather too much from an irritatingly gregarious scholar, Marco Calavita.

Like Kent Jones's *Hitchcock/Truffaut* (2015), *78/52* places its greatest faith in the insights and responses of filmmakers – not always a wise move. Philippe seems inordinately fond of a particular breed of contemporary horror-thriller practitioner: Leigh Whannell, Justin Benson, Eli Roth, Mick Garris and especially a chummy trio comprising Josh Waller, Daniel Noah and Elijah Wood.

The less than profound exclamations of *Psycho*-love from most of these guys – men outnumber women almost four to one in the expert-witness list – are usually prompted by having them comment 'live' as they gawk at the film unspooling on a monitor. It's an awkward and largely unproductive technique.

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Kerry Deignan Roy
**Written by**
Alexandre O. Philippe
**Director of Photography**
Robert Muratore
**Editor**
Chad Herschberger
**Music**
Jon Hegel
**Sound Recordists**
Phillip Lloyd Hegel
Chad Herschberger

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**Production Companies**
An Exhibit A Pictures film in association with ARTE, G.E.I.E., Milkhaus, Screen Division, Sensorshot Productions
Co-producer:
ARTE G.E.I.E.
**Executive Producers**
Felix Gill
Joey Porcelli
Randy Pharo

**With**
**Marli Renfro**
**Tere Carrubba**
**Alan Barnette**
**Richard Stanley**
**Elijah Wood**
**Josh C. Waller**
**Daniel Noah**
**Bret Easton Ellis**
**Leigh Whannell**
**Karyn Kusama**
**Peter Bogdanovich**
**Scott Spiegel**
**Mick Garris**
**Stephen Rebello**
**Marco Calavita**
**Eli Roth**
**Howie Movshovitz**
**Illeana Douglas**
**Aaron Moorhead**
**Justin Benson**
**Walter Murch**
**Kreng**
**David Thomson**
**Neil Marshall**
**Danny Elfman**
**Guillermo del Toro**
**Bob Murawski**
**Jamie Lee Curtis**
**Chris Innis**
**Jeffrey Ford**
**Osgood Perkins**
**Timothy Standring**
**Jim Hosney**
**Bill Krohn**
**Gary Rydstrom**
**Shannon Mills**
**Norman Hollyn**
**John Venzon**
**Amy E. Duddleston**
**Fred Raskin**
interviewees

**In Black & White and Colour [2.35:1]**

**Distributor**
Dogwoof

**A documentary about the famous shower scene in Alfred Hitchcock's 'Psycho' (1960), mixing clips, staged re-enactments, archival documents and interviews filmed on a set that recreates Norman Bates's home. Aspects of 'Psycho' that are covered include its production, promotion and exhibition; its influence on subsequent filmmakers; and its relationship to America's social history.**

# 6 Below

USA 2016
Director: Scott Waugh
Certificate 12A 98m 8s

**Reviewed by Kim Newman**

Though it confines its mention of religion to a Bible quote in the opening narration and a brief sequence of the protagonist's mother praying for his literal salvation, *6 Below: Miracle on the Mountain* has the feel of an evangelical film, right down to the use of a Christian rock song ('Tested') over the end credits and the reveal that post-mountain Eric LeMarque has become an inspirational speaker and loving family man. It's an archetypal prodigal-son story, in which a sinner comes back into the fold after suffering in the wilderness – though, as usual, all the dramatic interest is in the suffering rather than the redemption.

"This is a true story," insists a caption – notably less ambiguous than the usual weasel words "based on a true story" – and, for once, we never doubt it. The backstory doled out in bitesize flashbacks (domineering yet irresponsible coach/father, loving and supportive mom, ice-hockey career scuppered through ego, recourse to drugs and self-pity) may be tidy and soap opera-ish, but the business on the mountain is credibly undramatic. Eric faces a pair of wolves and sees them off by shouting; takes heed of the lecture delivered earlier by a nice warden not to eat snow (which lowers the body temperature and, counterintuitively, dehydrates you further); eats chewing gum, bark and his own scabs (a minor scratch sustained before the trip festers); strips out of sodden clothes after plunging through thin ice into a mountain lake and waits, nude but for his boots, for them to dry; and finally drags himself painfully to the summit of a handy peak so that his radio signal can be heard. His most symbolic survivalist gesture is throwing away his meth stash so that he can use the baggie to melt snow into potable water.

Unlike James Franco in *127 Hours* (2010), Josh Hartnett shuts down rather than opens up when alone on screen amid beautiful scenery that is trying to kill him – he's lost, not trapped, and gives a convincing, unsettling version of hypothermic delirium and determination to get back the life he's thrown away. It's an unshowy performance, but the big problem with the film is the trimmings. Mira Sorvino, only 11 years older than her co-star, is oddly cast as Eric's mother Susan. In their first scene together, they seem like an estranged couple, though Sorvino is more age appropriate in childhood flashbacks opposite

**Freeze frame: Josh Hartnett**

Kale Brady Culley as the young Eric. It doesn't help that she is stuck with a great many hand-wringing speeches, prompting the thought that Mrs LeMarque's whining solicitude may have been as much a factor in driving Eric to drugs (and up a mountain) as his father's impossible demands and subsequent abandonment of him.

Director Scott Waugh and writer Madison Turner are both former stuntmen, which explains why the physical business is so much stronger than the drama scenes. Waugh has improved since the dreadful God-and-country action film *Act of Valor* (2012), but only when no one's talking. The film is hampered by self-imposed restrictions on what it shows – there's a lot of dialogue about Eric's drug habit, and an honest depiction of the rush he gets when the first hit makes a blurry mountain come into focus, but scenes involving drug use are edited so that we never see him actually snort meth. Similarly, the gruesome details – something nasty in a sock aside – aren't dwelt on, at the risk of making an extraordinary survival read on screen as a simple matter of hiding in self-made igloos and waiting for the helicopter rescue.

After three days, the search-and-rescue operation was reclassified as body retrieval, but Eric held out for eight, earning the soubriquet 'Miracle Man' – though his general health level as a professional athlete (and even the palliative effects of self-medication) may have contributed as much to his survival as a mother's love and divine providence.

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Simon Swart
Bradley Pilz
Scott Waugh
Tucker Tooley
Josh Hartnett
**Written by**
Madison Turner
Based upon the book *Crystal Clear* by Eric LeMarque
with Davin Seay
**Director of Photography**
Michael Svitak
**Edited by**
Vashi Nedomansky
Scott Waugh
**Production Designer**
Diane Millet
**Music**
Nathan Furst
**Sound Design**
Ethan Van der Ryn
Erik Aadahl
**Costume Designer**
Jaqueline Newell
**Stunt Co-ordinator**
Matt Baker

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**Production Companies**
October Sky Pictures, Tucker Tooley Entertainment, Sonar Entertainment, Stormchaser Films
A Scott Waugh film
**Executive Producers**
Eric LeMarque
Greg P. Russell
Madison Turner
David Grace
Michael Mailis
Tom Lesinski
Greg Renker
Louise Linton

**Cast**
**Josh Hartnett**
Eric LeMarque
**Mira Sorvino**
Susan LeMarque
**Sarah Dumont**
Sarah
**Jason Cottle**
David LeMarque

**In Colour [2.75:1]**

**Distributor**
Signature Entertainment

**California, 2004. Eric LeMarque, a former professional ice-hockey player, survives a car crash but faces charges of driving dangerously under the influence of drugs. Fleeing his troubles, he goes snowboarding in the Sierra Nevada mountains and becomes lost. He survives in the wilderness for eight days. When he doesn't appear for his court date, his mother Susan alerts the local rescue services, who have little hope that he'll still be alive. Realising that emergency scanners can triangulate on any signal, Eric climbs a mountain peak with a portable radio turned on, and is rescued by helicopter. He loses both legs to frostbite but becomes drug-free.**

# Thelma

Norway/Sweden/Denmark/France 2017
Director: Joachim Trier

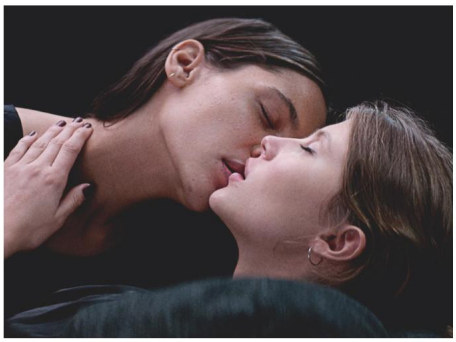
**Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton**

**Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist**

*Thelma* begins with the image of a father, ostensibly on a deer-hunting trip with his young daughter, turning his gun away from a sure-shot kill to aim it at the back of the girl's head instead, holding it there for a tense moment, then lowering it again. By the time the film is over, we have seen that same man clawing at the surface of a frozen lake while trying to get to the corpse of his infant son underneath, borne witness to a case of parricide-by-pyrokinesis and enjoyed a threesome with a satanic snake. Pretty strong meat there from writer-director Joachim Trier – but strange as it is to say, for all this atrocity exhibition, his *Thelma* lacks a real sense of danger, of the awful.

The film, a lesbian coming-out story that incorporates elements of supernatural horror, is a Norwegian homecoming for Trier, whose English-language *Louder Than Bombs* (2015) was a misstep in a career that until then had seemed fortune-favoured. He is on surer ground here in some respects, working with young actors with whom he has a clear rapport. Elli Harboe has the title role, that of a small-town girl whose conservative Christian values are challenged when she falls for a classmate, Anja, played by musician Kaya Wilkins, and in the resulting confusion discovers that she has buried supernatural abilities. Harboe and Wilkins's performances – simple, open and absent of affect – are the movie's primary virtue, the characters presented with great sympathy. But this is perhaps where that abovementioned lack comes in: at no point can you imagine the filmmaker letting anything irreversibly terrible happen to his characters, and indeed nothing does.

In its focus on a repressed young woman's dangerous coming of age, its campus setting and its slow reveal of dangerous family secrets, *Thelma* closely parallels Julia Ducournau's *Raw* (2016),



**What a Carrie on: Kaya Wilkins, Eili Harboe**

and both might be considered works after the model of Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976), made by epigones. *Thelma* even borrows the stifling air of religious repression from Stephen King and De Palma's source materials, though here it's of the frigid Scandinavian variety. Our heroine's overbearing parents (Henrik Rafaelsen and Ellen Dorrit Petersen) have drilled abstemious faith into their daughter, though it isn't entirely clear whether this is a matter of true belief, merely a means to keep her latent psychic abilities under control, or some combination of the two. As in this case, the film has a tendency to skate past the more interesting issues that it raises on the way to its sweet and very tidy resolution, which finds Thelma and Anja together as a couple, Thelma having thrown off the shackles of patriarchal oppression – though this happy send-off glosses over the difficulties that might be faced in a secular relationship in which one of the partners is gifted with godlike powers of mental control. A sense of benevolence isn't a shortcoming in an artist, but in a film like *Thelma* it acts as a kind of hobbling restraint, a guarantor that all will be well when what's needed is the fear that all could be lost.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**
Thomas Robsahm
**Written by**
Eskil Vogt
Joachim Trier
**Director of Photography**
Jakob Ihre
**Editor**
Olivier Bugge Coutté
**Production Designer**
Roger Rosenberg
**Music**
Ola Fløttum
**Sound Designer**
Gisle Tveito
**Costume Designer**
Ellen Dæhli Ystehede
**Visual Effects**
Ghost VFX
The Gentlemen
Broncos VFX
Hydralab
Nordisk Film Shortcut
Storyline
Slowmotion FX
Goodbye Kansas

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**Production Companies**
Motlys and Memento Films International presents a Motlys production in co-production with Film i Väst, Le Pacte, Filmpool Nord, Snowglobe, B-Reel Films, Don't Look Now, Copenhagen Film Fund
With support from Norsk filminstitutt, Eurimages, Nordisk Film & TV Fond, Det Danske Filminstitut, Svenska Filminstitutet, Creative Europe - Media
A film by Joachim Trier
Financed by Norsk filminstitutt, Eurimages, Film i Väst, Le Pacte, Dansk Filminstitutt, Nordic Film & TV Fund, Filmpool Nord, Memento International Sales, SF Norge, Motlys, Storyline Post Production, Swedish Film Institute, Copenhagen Film Fund, Creative Europe Program - Media of the European Union, TV2, Cmore, Don't Look Now, DR, Snowglobe, Triart Film, B-Reel Films
**Executive Producers**
Sigve Endresen
Eskil Vogt
Joachim Trier

### Cast

**Eili Harboe**
Thelma
**Kaya Wilkins**
Anja
**Henrik Rafaelsen**
Trond
**Ellen Dorrit Petersen**
Unni

**In Colour**
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**
Thunderbird Releasing

**A university in Oslo, Norway, present day. Thelma is having trouble fitting in with her fellow students because she is a teetotaller and a Christian from a rural background. One day she suffers a seizure; she keeps this news from her father and wheelchair-bound mother, who call her daily, and begins a friendship with Anja, a girl from her classes. Their friendship develops into an unspoken attraction, though when they share passionate kisses after attending a dance recital together, Thelma retreats in panic. The turmoil of her sexual confusion seems to awaken telekinetic abilities in her. Concerned that she may be epileptic, Thelma consults a neurologist, who attempts to induce a seizure in her by probing into her anxieties, including those surrounding her budding same-sex desires. This process brings on another telekinetic burst, after which Anja disappears. Studying her family history with her physician, Thelma learns that the grandmother she thought dead is in fact still alive, and is in an institution, having been committed following the disappearance of her husband. After a visit to the institution, Thelma becomes convinced that she has psychic abilities, and is responsible for Anja's disappearance. She returns home, where her parents confirm her suspicion, then privately plot to kill her, in order to remove a menace from the world. Thelma seems to intuit their intentions, dispatching her father with pyrokinesis, and after healing her mother's lamed legs, restores Anja to the corporeal world, where they reunite and begin a romantic relationship in earnest.**

# Unrest

USA/United Kingdom 2017
Director: Jennifer Brea

**Reviewed by Hannah McGill**

Jennifer Brea recognises that she's a good advertisement for her own cause – greater recognition of and more funding for the condition known as chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). Why, after all, would a lively, clever, affluent and beautiful person, newly married to a similarly gilded sort and keen to have children, feign or exaggerate an illness that is draining her life of all its conspicuous potential?

While the film Brea has directed and narrated about her experience of CFS (also known as myalgic encephalomyelitis, or ME) and her personal research into the condition is not defensive in tone, engagement with the suspicion of fakery is unavoidable. CFS fascinates not only because the source of its myriad symptoms (among them debilitating tiredness, joint and muscle pains, headaches, cognitive impairment, digestion issues, depression) still evades medical science, but because of the theories that breed in the space opened by this absence of scientific legitimisation. Are sufferers – of whom 17 million are estimated to exist worldwide, more than 80 per cent of them female – in the grip of a physical ailment yet to be determined? Might their condition be neurological – or psychiatric? Are they particularly sensitive radars for pollutants – mould, industrial chemicals or food additives? Could their bodies, like that of Julianne Moore's protagonist in *Safe* (1995), be registering a hysterical objection to multiple aspects of modern life at once? And is one cause or explanation more valid, more respectable, more *real* than another?

Brea's film acknowledges both the mystique attending her condition and the frustrations it can spur in the friends and relatives of those affected. We witness a father's eye-roll when a young woman, bedbound since her teenage years, complains that the sound of her birthday present being unwrapped is "too loud"; we see the strain tell on Brea's own husband, politics professor Omar Wasow, as she experiments with additions and exclusions to their lifestyle. The film's position, however, is that the lack of medical understanding can be squarely blamed on inadequate attention and insufficient research. Parallels are drawn with the struggles faced by the first carriers of HIV to have their symptoms recognised; and with multiple sclerosis, which, notes immunologist Nancy Klimas, "was called hysterical paralysis right up to the day they invented the CAT scan machine".

A villain presents himself in the form of Per Fink, a Danish specialist who considers CFS to be a mental-health issue and favours the forcible removal of patients from their home environments. A hero, too: a sufferer's contrite husband who, years after leaving her in the suspicion that she was malingering, returns, apologises and remarries her. And a battery of enthusiastic online amateurs, who claim to have annihilated their symptoms using this, that or the other dietary or environmental shift. "Maybe it's harder to see the harm when it's caused by good intentions," muses Brea in voiceover – an ambiguous comment that might refer to numerous

approaches to the condition, from the supposed "coddling" of sufferers that Fink disdains to the treatment of physical symptoms as purely hysterical in origin.

Brea's film mingles elements of the campaigning documentary (like many such works, it ends with a rousing montage of activists the world over rallying to the cause, albeit often from their beds), the truth-seeking cinematic self-portrait and the scientific study. It's this last aspect that gets shortest shrift, with the consequence that the film feels more emotional than rigorous. Perhaps that's only appropriate for a work that primarily intends to highlight the physical and psychological distress experienced by sufferers, the people a new campaign spearheaded by Brea terms the 'Millions Missing'. Of course, the name also refers to the absent research funding that activists believe could make the difference in decoding, demystifying and treating this most confounding of conditions.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Jennifer Brea
Lindsey Dryden
Patricia E. Gillespie
**Producer**
Alysa Nahmias
**Written by**
Jennifer Brea
Kim Roberts
**Cinematography**
Sam Heesen
Christian Laursen
**Edited by**
Kim Roberts
Emiliano Battista
**Music by/ Recorded by/Score Conducted by**
Bear McCreary
**Production Sound Mixers**
Nikky French
Kyle Porter

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**Production Companies**
A Shella Films and Little by Little Films production in association with Impact Partners and Chicken & Egg Pictures
Made with the generous support of The William F. Harnisch Foundation, Chicken & Egg, Fledgling Film Fund, Women in Film Finishing Fund, The Theo Westenberger Estate, Influence Film Foundation, Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program, Sundance Institute Creative Distribution Fellowship
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**Executive Producers**
Deborah Hoffmann
Ruth Ann Harnisch
Regina K. Scully
Ian Darling
Dan Cogan
Lisa Gunn
Lynda Weinman
Donna Fairman
Wilson

**In Colour [2.35:1]**

**Distributor**
Together Films

**Princeton, New Jersey, the present. Jennifer Brea, a journalist in her early thirties, films herself experiencing some of the symptoms of chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) – pain, numbness, confusion, collapse – and details how the condition has affected her life over the past few years. Brea communicates online with other sufferers, many of whom are entirely bedbound, and examines varying approaches to diagnosis and treatment, including the controversy surrounding Danish doctor Per Fink, whose belief that CFS is purely psychological saw him institutionalise one young patient against her parents' wishes. Brea's husband Omar reassures her of his love, while she bemoans having deprived him of what he expected from marriage. Brea becomes an activist for increased CFS awareness, and helps to spearhead international days of protest.**

# Victoria & Abdul

USA/United Kingdom 2017
Director: Stephen Frears
Certificate PG 111m 32s

**Reviewed by Kate Stables**

British cinema has had more Queen Victorias than any other character, owing to its habit of treating the monarch to makeovers reflecting prevailing cultural needs. The reverential pomp of *Victoria the Great* and *Sixty Glorious Years* shored up the faltering monarchy of the late 1930s; *Mrs Brown* humanised her for the sceptical 1990s; and *The Young Victoria* made her a poster girl for noughties female empowerment. Now, in Stephen Frears's playful drama, the tetchy elderly empress (Judi Dench) is remade as an early multiculturalist, revitalised by her unlikely late-life friendship with Indian footman Abdul Karim and his teachings on Indian culture.

Frears and screenwriter Lee Hall engage in some mischievous Brexit-baiting in this energetic comedy of manners, infusing what could have been a piece of imperial nostalgia with a merciless critique of late-Victorian England's snobbery and racism. Laced with sharp-eyed commentary on the royal household's antipathy to Muslims (their horror at Abdul's Koran and Urdu teaching equals their contempt for his race), it's also something of a Trump tease.

Experienced in unwrapping regal crises after *The Queen* (2006), Frears sets up Victoria's surprisingly needy friendship with the amiable Abdul as a culture-clash comedy with a soft, emotional centre. Despite much time spent poking fun at the lavish lifestyle, the relentless toadying and stultifying protocol of the royal household, the film feasts visually on glittering banquets, battalions of servants and pretty palaces. Too cynical and broadly comic to be a Sunday TV offering, it nonetheless goes big on the *Downton Abbey*-ish theme of forbidden servant/mistress friendship. Aside from the thoughtful use of Abdul as a symbol of Britain's conflicted relationship with India (his empire-hating footman friend Mohammed – a caustic Adeel Akhtar – adds a nicely prickly note), little new ground is broken here.

Much of it was broken already, of course, in John Madden's *Mrs Brown* (1997), to which this film forms an affectionate companion piece.

**Special subject: Judi Dench, Ali Fazal**

Winking back at its predecessor (Lady Churchill pronounces Abdul "the brown John Brown", Victoria sobs over his loss with Abdul), the film gains an added resonance from Dench's continued presence. However, Hall's script paints Victoria's fondness for Abdul as maternal rather than romantic, emotionally supplanting her heir, Eddie Izzard's appealingly infuriated schemer Bertie.

The film's gentler comedy is in the odd couple's cultural exchanges: she introduces him to tweed ("Everything is scratchy in Scotland") and rain-lashed tea parties, while he rhapsodises to her about Mughal culture and mangoes (she has one sent from India, and it arrives symbolically rotten). There's also a neat echo of the Indian Mutiny, of which Abdul's teaching gives an unhelpfully partial view, in the household uprising that erupts at the news of his upcoming ennoblement.

Dench, whose shrewd, selfish, embattled Victoria runs the gamut from weary self-pity to steely determination, makes it a battle royal. Her bravura performance, much of it conducted with Frears's camera fixed on her beady eyes, is the film's *raison d'être*. But set against Ali Fazal's boyish, less complex Abdul, it gives the film a slightly uneven feel, as does the entertaining but lopsided mix of relationship drama and broad-strokes comedy. Cheerfully middlebrow, highly engaging and containing just enough cultural critique not to frighten the horses, *Victoria & Abdul* is a work of considerable charm, even if it's perhaps less spiky than it imagines.

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**
Tim Bevan
Eric Fellner
Beeban Kidron
Tracey Seaward
**Screenplay**
Lee Hall
Based on the book by Shrabani Basu
**Director of Photography**
Danny Cohen
**Editor**
Melanie Ann Oliver
**Production Designer**
Alan MacDonald
**Music**
Thomas Newman
**Production Sound Mixer**
Peter Lindsay
**Costume Designer**
Consolata Boyle

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**Production Companies**
A Focus Features and BBC Films presentation in association with Perfect World Pictures
A Working Title production in association with Cross Street Films
A Stephen Frears film
Developed in association with BBC Films
**Executive Producers**
Lee Hall
Amelia Granger
Liza Chasin
Christine Langan
Joe Oppenheimer

### Cast

**Judi Dench**
Queen Victoria
**Ali Fazal**
Abdul Karim
**Eddie Izzard**
Bertie, Prince of Wales
**Adeel Akhtar**
Mohammed
**Tim Pigott-Smith**
Sir Henry Ponsonby
**Olivia Williams**
Lady Churchill
**Fenella Woolgar**
Miss Phipps
**Paul Higgins**
Dr Reid
**Robin Soans**
Arthur Bigge
**Julian Wadham**
Alick Yorke
**Simon Callow**
Giacomo Puccini
**Michael Gambon**
Lord Salisbury

**Dolby Digital**
**In Colour [2.35:1]**

**Distributor**
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

**Windsor Castle, 1887. An ageing, jaded Queen Victoria is charmed by Indian servant Abdul Karim, sent from Agra with a jubilee tribute. A friendship blooms. He tutors the queen in Mughal culture and Urdu script. She appoints him her 'munshi' (teacher). Horrified, the royal household staff snoop on them. Victoria confesses her loneliness to Abdul. He convinces her that serving her subjects is vital. They pledge their friendship and she gives him a gold locket. Bertie, Prince of Wales, is appalled. The household and prime minister try to oust Abdul. Abdul's friend Mohammed warns him of their plots and refuses to help Bertie discredit Abdul. Victoria tries to send Abdul home for teaching her skewed Indian history, but relents. There is great disquiet among the royal household at the news of a knighthood for Abdul, and Bertie threatens to have the queen certified insane. Victoria faces them down, and gives Abdul a medal. Mohammed dies, and Victoria gives the grieving Abdul permission to go home. He refuses, and continues to serve her. Years later, he comforts Victoria on her deathbed. He is grief-stricken at her death. Bertie sends Abdul back to India, and has Victoria's letters to him burned. In Agra, Abdul visits Victoria's statue and kisses her feet.**

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# Home cinema

Under western guise: *Le Vent d'est* (1970) was conceived as a 'left-wing spaghetti western' but serves instead as a critique of all prior political cinema

# NOBODY SAID IT WAS GOING TO BE FUN

The films Jean-Luc Godard made with Jean-Pierre Gorin stand as monuments to leftist political commitment. But why watch them?

## JEAN-LUC GODARD + JEAN-PIERRE GORIN: FIVE FILMS, 1968–1971

**LE VENT D'EST / UN FILM COMME LES AUTRES/ LUTTES EN ITALIE / VLADIMIR ET ROSA / BRITISH SOUNDS**

Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin; France 1968-71; Arrow Academy/ Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 95 / 107 / 59 / 96 / 51 minutes; 1.37:1. Features: video interview with Godard; 100-page booklet.

## TOUT VA BIEN

Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin; France 1972; Arrow Academy / Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; Certificate 18; 95 minutes; 1.66:1. Features: Godard and Gorin's *Letter to Jane* (1972); video interviews with Godard and Gorin; 48-page booklet.

**Reviewed by Henry K. Miller**

"If you make a million prints of a Marxist-Leninist film," says a narrator in *British Sounds* (1969), "you get *Gone with the Wind*." But what about when it's included in a DVD box-set, with full-colour booklet?

At the end of *Weekend* (1967), Godard declared "*fin de cinéma*". The films of the Dziga-Vertov Group, principally Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin – no one is credited – marked a break not only with cinema's formal conventions, but with the commercial pattern of production, distribution and cinema exhibition. All of them were made in the aftermath of May 1968, in which student demonstrations and occupations in Paris precipitated a general strike, and most are attempts to analyse what had just happened, and pose, for an audience of putative 'militants', the question, *Que faire?* What is to be done?

The protagonist of *Le Petit Soldat* (1963), a plausible proxy for the younger Godard, was a self-described "guy with no ideals" who imagined that the generation of the 1930s faced a much simpler choice of political commitments; it was he who declared that the cinema was truth "24 times a second", the only thing worth believing in. The reversal in the films Godard made with Gorin, a young intellectual who along with Anne Wiazemsky provided Godard with an entrée to the student movement and the Left Bank *maîtres à penser*, is twofold: from cynicism to Maoism, and from faith in images to a conception of cinema as ideology 24 times a second. The main narrator of *Le Vent d'est* asks, "What is to be done to avoid making images and sounds which come from the domination of the ruling class?"

While coming up with an answer, Godard and Gorin decided virtually to do without images. Most of the films are soundtracks with deliberately perfunctory image-tracks, most glaringly in *Le Vent d'est* (1970). Conceived as a left-wing spaghetti western, it is instead (among other things) a critique of all prior political cinema, sporadically illustrated by half-heartedly shot and acted scenes from the western, and footage of the disputatious shoot. The first of the series, *Un film comme les autres* (1968), likewise subordinates images – for the most part a group of students and workers, faces obscured by vegetation, discussing the recent May 'events' in a patch of urban scrubland – to sounds, largely a mixture of their discussion with a chronology of the uprising.

All these films demand that the viewer (or listener) knows, for example, what the Movement of 22 March was, but *Un film comme les autres*, almost despite itself, does provide images of May,

*The reversal here is from cynicism to Maoism, and from faith in images to a conception of cinema as ideology 24 times a second*

and more open reflection by participants on what one of them calls a "revolution *manqué*" than the later films. Moreover, it is easier to understand *Un film...* as an act of "giving voice" on Godard's part. Colin MacCabe, the films' principal apologist in English, wrote of them as refusing "the defining relations of documentary in which the image functions as confirmation of the sound". Still, the "correct sound", according to MacCabe, was Maoist. While the students and workers of *Un film...* talk about whether car factories ought to be turned over to bus production, or whether French television should show only good films, one of the other voices is an ardent advocate of revolutionary terror, and it is this voice, or others like it, that prevails in the later films.

As Gorin once said, the "pure Marxists", including the real equivalents of the characters in *La Chinoise* (1967), were unprepared for May, and these films, rather than embodying or even communicating the utopian dreams of that month, instead constitute a bitter reckoning with its failure to usher in – well, what? *Le Vent d'est* includes a Maoist denunciation, over a mostly red screen, of 'autogestion', one of the catchwords of May, meaning something like workers' self-management. What would be preferable is dictatorship of the proletariat; it is no use, she continues, pretending that socialism, as realised in China, is "a bed of roses". No kidding. There are other voices in the film, including one representing bleeding-heart "bourgeois humanism", plainly there to be mocked, but none of them (except Mao's) are Chinese.

In a militant film, it is said in *British Sounds*, "the screen is no more than a blackboard offering a concrete analysis of a concrete situation", but while the blackboard metaphor is literalised more than once, what is meant by "concrete analysis" is almost always a crude abstraction of a given reality into the 'correct' theoretical terms. The covert appeal to the spectator here is not analysis but concrete – the hardness. *Luttes en Italie* (1970) consists of a student militant castigating herself for corrupting her diligent revolutionary praxis with bourgeois ideology; bent on "changing my life and transforming myself", she seeks a total break with the past; but the hair shirt and the chiliastic dream of year zero are both major traditions in Western culture.

*Tout va bien* (1972), which announces itself as a return to stories, stars and cinemas, is also a return to images. Jane Fonda and Yves Montand play an unhappy couple, she a journalist, he a "filmmaker who makes commercials", who get caught up in a wildcat strike in a sausage factory; she, he, the factory boss, the union official who opposes the strike, and the young leftist who instigated it, each get a monologue to explain their positions in the class struggle. Except for a scene of sublime but probably unintentional comedy in *British Sounds* in which a group of radicals sets about rewriting the Beatles ("You say US / I say Mao"), watching these films is a miserable experience, and it's meant to be; but nor can watching them be construed as politically useful. So why do it? To know more of the mind of one of the great film artists – surely one of the most bourgeois-humanist rationales going. S

# New releases

## THE DAY OF THE JACKAL

Fred Zinnemann; UK/France 1973; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 143 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: appreciation (Neil Sinyard), location report, Fred Zinnemann interview, trailer, BD-ROM screenplay, booklet

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

Fred Zinnemann's assassination procedural wears its 44 years well, its almost documentary-style attention to detail proving as gripping as ever as it interweaves the plans of Charles de Gaulle's would-be killer (Edward Fox) with that of the manhunt trying to stop him (led by Michel Lonsdale). The latter is presumably there primarily to prevent us from sympathising too much with the former, which is easy to do: Fox gives a terrifically charismatic performance as the much-pseudonymed Jackal, blithely morphing from foppish tan-suited cravat-toting Englishman to Danish schoolteacher to disabled war veteran, seducing people of both sexes to gain a temporary advantage over his pursuers, while casually bumping off anyone who threatens to upset his fetishistically detailed plans. Despite the location of virtually every scene, scarcely a line of French is spoken, and the cast also wisely eschews comedy accents: instead, assorted British and French actors perform in their own natural voices. The French originally coined the term 'a well-made play' ('*une pièce bien faite*'), and this is the suspense-thriller equivalent: like the Jackal himself, Zinnemann and his team do their job with meticulous professionalism, and a welcome preference for visual over dialogue-driven *mise en scène*.

**Disc:** The film benefits significantly from this high-definition upgrade (especially given the number of long shots), and the extras intelligently combine a substantial new critical appreciation from Zinnemann expert Neil Sinyard with footage from the shoot, including a too-brief interview with the director. Those with BD-ROM drives can also read Kenneth Ross's screenplay, while the booklet offers pieces on the making of the film (by Mark Cunliffe) and, fascinatingly, the film's initial treatment on British television (by Sheldon Hall), which prompted a complaint from Zinnemann himself.

## ENTERTAINING MR SLOANE

Douglas Hickox; UK 1970; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 94 minutes; 1.85:1. Features: interviews (Leonie Orton, John Lahr, Peter McEnery), locations featurette; trailer

## LOOT

Silvio Narizzano; UK 1970; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 102 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: interviews (Leonie Orton, John Lahr), archive materials (*The Eamonn Andrews Show*), stills gallery

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

Three years after Joe Orton's murder, the only two big-screen adaptations of his plays were released in rapid succession. Neither is entirely satisfactory; but *Entertaining Mr Sloane*'s strong casting counters the unfortunate decision to relocate the action from blandly generic suburbia to an eccentric neo-Gothic pile, diluting the foreground action's transgressive impact. Orton's calculatedly arch dialogue is well delivered by a pitch-perfect quartet: Peter McEnery's openly bisexual bottle-blonde lounge-lizard Sloane, Beryl Reid's lonely middle-aged nymphomaniac, Harry Andrews as her brother (whose pink Pontiac eye-catchingly signals his preferences) and Alan Webb's half-blind Kemp, whose lack of sexual interest in Sloane means that he sees right through him from the start.

On stage, played absolutely straight (as in Jonathan Lynn's 1984 production with Leonard Rossiter), *Loot* is one of the most lethally funny plays in the English language, a comedy so black that it retains a fair shock-value quotient half a century on. It would be impossible to completely blunt its impact, but Silvio Narizzano has an alarmingly good try, thanks to an overbearingly manic approach to direction, cutting, art direction and music. The cast also turns things up to 11, with Richard Attenborough's swivel-eyed Inspector Truscott having apparently escaped from a *Beano* strip. Milo O'Shea and Lee Remick row against the prevailing current and consequently give much the strongest performances as the newly bereaved McLeavy and his decidedly unorthodox nurse.

**Discs:** Both films look superb in high definition, and the extras complement each other nicely, with interviews with Orton's sister Leonie and biographer John Lahr split across each disc. *Sloane* also gets a Peter McEnery reminiscence and an engaging featurette in which Richard Dacre covers a fair bit more ground than just the film's locations, while *Loot* includes Orton's 1967 appearance on *The Eamonn Andrews Show*, the only surviving footage of him.

## A FISH CALLED WANDA

Charles Crichton; UK/US 1988; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 108 minutes; 1.85:1. Features: introduction, commentary (both by John Cleese), documentaries (*John Cleese's Final Farewell Performance*, *Something Fishy*, *On Location*), interview (Roger Murray-Leach), appreciation (Vic Pratt), deleted scenes, trivia track, trailer, booklet

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

During a decade when British films were perpetually 'coming', this was one of the few homegrown features that actually hit the critical and commercial jackpot. As a piece of craftsmanship, it's calibrated to the frame: writer-star John Cleese hired Ealing veteran Charles Crichton (*The Lavender Hill Mob*) specifically for his decades of experience and background as an editor, and the jewel-heist logistics are a masterclass in efficiency – Crichton didn't make *The Ladykillers*, but there's a marked resemblance both in core narrative (thieves falling out after a crime) and a running gag involving the attempted assassination of an elderly woman. But, as ever with

# New releases

British comedies, most of the dramatic and comic tension ultimately revolves around class, whether Establishment (Cleese's barrister) or prole (Michael Palin), English or American (Jamie Lee Curtis, Kevin Kline). Kline's Trumpian delusions trigger many of the most reliable laughs, although the repeated use of stuttering and homophobia for laughs places the film squarely in its production era – as does the remarkable lack of internal security at Heathrow Airport, where the climax is set. Kline gleefully upstages everyone when he's on screen, but when he's out of the way the others' performances are revealed as rather more nuanced: the unlikely romance between Cleese and Curtis is surprisingly touching (Archie Leach is by some distance Cleese's most rounded character besides Basil Fawlty), while a series of inadvertent dog-slayings beautifully combines exquisitely bad-taste gags with a poignancy engendered by Palin's genuine distress at what he's wrought.
**Disc:** The new 4K restoration is state of the art. A crammed package combines pieces familiar from earlier releases (including John Cleese's commentary) with new material, such as an engaging appreciation by the BFI's Vic Pratt, an interview with the production designer and a booklet essay from Sophie Monks Kaufman.

## THE LEGEND OF THE HOLY DRINKER

Ermanno Olmi; Italy 1988; Arrow Academy/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; Certificate PG; 127 minutes; 1.85:1. Features: interviews with Rutger Hauer and Tullio Kezich; essay by Helen Chambers.

**Reviewed by Geoff Andrew**

Thanks to his best known films (*Il posto* and *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*), Ermanno Olmi is widely regarded as a latter-day neorealist. That he has customarily favoured location shooting, non-professional actors, long takes, and narratives notable more for their sociopolitical significance than for any dramatic momentum would seem to support such a view. Yet some of his finest work – *Long Live the Lady!* (1987) and *The Profession of Arms* (2001), for example, or his remarkable final fiction feature, 2007's *One Hundred Nails* (he now makes only documentaries) – don't quite fit that category, being distinctive primarily for their unpredictability, their occasional leanings towards the surreal and allegorical, and their fundamental strangeness.

This Golden Lion-winning adaptation of Joseph Roth's novella is a case in point. The story of a Silesian tramp living in Paris who is given 200 francs by a total stranger and thereby offered an opportunity to revisit and even rejoin 'respectable' society becomes, in Olmi's characteristically delicate hands, a kind of weirdly unassertive parable that eschews facile notions of 'redemption'. Andreas – very subtly played by Rutger Hauer, one of several professional actors atypically deployed in the movie – is a complex creation: a man of honour but undeniably weak will, he is repeatedly distracted from returning the money to a chapel devoted to St Thérèse by his own devotion to wine, women and any unforeseen luxury that might come his way. On one level, with its sparse, almost stilted dialogue, low-level characterisation and stark story, the film feels almost undernourished, a fairytale rather than a fully developed narrative. At the same time, however, as it slips casually and elliptically between present and past, 'reality' and desirous fantasy, often improbably accompanied by some decidedly playful snippets of Stravinsky, it takes on an aura of timelessness, a quality enhanced by Olmi's lyrical evocation of a Paris that is a tantalising mix of the 1980s, the 1930s of Roth's novella, and indeed the years between. The quietly bizarre but resonant result is a deceptively simple film of considerable charm, wit and enduring mystery.
**Disc:** Dante Spinotti's lovely lighting is well served by the 4K restoration. A recent interview with Hauer has its moments, but far more revealing and rewarding is a pleasingly informal, garrulous session with co-writer Tullio Kezich, who finally confesses that even he doesn't really know what the film is about.

## THE LOST WORLD

Harry O'Hoyt; USA 1925; Flicker Alley/region-free Blu-ray; 110 minutes; 1.33:1. Features: commentary, shorts, gallery, deleted scenes and booklet.

**Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson**

Harry O'Hoyt's jungle romp *The Lost World* is an adaptation of one of Arthur Conan Doyle's Professor Challenger tales. Wallace Beery plays the eccentric prof, who leads a team of explorers including Bessie Love to a remote plateau in the Amazon where dinosaurs still walk the earth. Those stop-motion dinosaurs, brilliantly animated by Willis O'Brien, are the film's trump card, and surely the reason why it was a smash hit on its release in 1925, but they may also have led to its downfall. In 1929, *The Lost World* was removed from circulation, with all prints and negatives supposedly destroyed. It is perhaps not a coincidence that a month later O'Brien was hired to animate *King Kong*, finally released in 1933.

So *The Lost World* was seen for years only in an abridged version, until two restorations made in 1998 and 2000 capitalised on a nearly complete 35mm copy found in a Czech archive. Now *The Lost World* has been restored again, as four more reels have been discovered, containing missing footage, plus original intertitles and tints. The jaw-dropping addition is a fancy colour treatment that allows a T rex in a blue-tinted scene to carry a glowing red torch in its mouth. The movie now gleams in 2k digital and is backed by an epic score from Robert Israel.

*Legend of the Holy Drinker*

The film plays out like a Boy's Own caper, but a classy one: Beery is always compelling to watch and the deftness of the animation is still astonishing, especially in the volcanic eruption sequence, or the climax, with an escaped brontosaurus wreaking havoc in Edwardian London.
**Disc:** Extras include booklet essays by Israel and Serge Bromberg, a gallery and a meticulous audio commentary by Nicolas Ciccone, detailing the differences between alternative versions of the film and the changes from the novel plus production history, including secrets of the animation. There are also deleted scenes, two short films directed by O'Brien, and a fragment of his unfinished *Creation*, which inspired Merian C. Cooper to hire him for *King Kong*.

## FILMS BY LASZLO MOHOLY-NAGY

**IMPRESSIONS OF THE OLD MARSEILLE HARBOR, A LIGHTPLAY: BLACK WHITE GRAY, BERLIN STILL LIFE, BIG CITY GYPSIES, ARCHITECTS' CONGRESS, LOBSTERS, THE NEW ARCHITECTURE AND THE LONDON ZOO, DESIGN WORKSHOPS, DO NOT DISTURB**

László Moholy-Nagy; France 1929/Germany 1930/Germany 1931/Germany 1932/France/Greece 1933/UK 1936/UK 1936/US 1944/US 1945; Facets/region-free DVDs; 9/6/9/11/29/26/16/36/20 minutes; 1.33:1

**Reviewed by Isabel Stevens**

In official feature film history, the Hungarian polymath László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) occupies a small 'what-if'-style footnote. The avant-garde artist, designer and photographer was commissioned to provide special effects for the 2036-set scenes of the 1936 adaptation of H.G. Wells's sci-fi epic *Things to Come*. Sadly, only a few seconds of his kaleidoscopic inventions (involving revolving cones and multiplying prisms) were deemed acceptable by director William Cameron Menzies and producer Alexander Korda, and Moholy-Nagy went uncredited even for these.

As this illuminating and varied collection of most of the artist's surviving shorts shows, *Things to Come* was not the end (or even the beginning) of Moholy-Nagy's dabbling with the moving image. What's surprising, given his obsession with light and his avant-garde background (he flirted with several movements but his spiritual home was the short-lived Bauhaus) is that 1930's *Light Play* is his only truly abstract film. A giddy and hypnotic dazzle of shapes, lines, reflections and shadows, emanating from Moholy-Nagy's kinetic sculpture *Light-Space Modulator*, the film conveys the all-encompassing excitement that many avant-gardists then felt about the possibilities of cinema (far better than, say, Man Ray's tepid 'Look what I can do with a camera' experiments) and makes you wish Menzies and co had more of a wild side.

Moholy-Nagy's playful spirit can be traced throughout much of his filmography. He made a fair few documentaries and, when he came to England (fleeing Nazi Germany), he was clearly not one to submit to the straightforward diktats of commercial commissions: *Lobsters* (1936), with its educational narration and chirpy soundtrack, may be quite a conventional study of fishermen

and their catch, but in the end scene, the titular crustaceans (and the artist) have the last laugh, as a claw breaks through a restaurant menu to snap at the camera. In his rather lovely 1936 study of London Zoo, he went further off-piste, captivated totally by the surreal shapes and forms of penguins, elephants and giraffes colliding with the zoo's bold new Modernist architecture. He also had fun with his intertitles, eschewing narration for spatial drawings of each animal's enclosure.

If *Architects' Congress* (1933), a 29-minute folly of a travelogue, shows that Moholy-Nagy could lapse into indulgence, his city films demonstrate his rigorous documentarian's eye for the overlooked. Fast-paced and intent on mining Modernist patterns out of the cityscape, his urban essays aren't typical city symphonies, in that they're ultimately more interested in people than the buzz of streets. *Impressions of the Old Marseille Harbor* (1929) may start gliding over a flashy new bridge, but Moholy-Nagy spends far more time showing the toil of the city's denizens and ends his wandering essay in the slums.

The last two films in the collection, made in America, where Moholy-Nagy eventually settled, are the product of his time at the Chicago School of Design, which he founded and directed. *Design Workshops* (1944) revels in many of his students' creations, while *Do Not Disturb* (1945), a direct collaboration with a group of students, is the real curio of the collection: a *noir*ish, dialogue-free tale of *amour fou* told with all manner of visual tricks, it shows Moholy-Nagy's lust for experimentation never dimmed.
**Discs:** Bare-bones transfers with no extras.

## NEW BATTLES WITHOUT HONOUR AND HUMANITY: THE COMPLETE TRILOGY

**NEW BATTLES WITHOUT HONOUR AND HUMANITY / NEW BATTLES WITHOUT HONOUR AND HUMANITY: THE BOSS'S HEAD / NEW BATTLES WITHOUT HONOUR AND HUMANITY: LAST DAYS OF THE BOSS**

Fukasaku Kinji; Japan 1974/75/76; Arrow Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 98/94/91mins; Certificate 18; 2.35:1. Features: video appreciation by Fukasaku biographer Sadao Yamane; two new interviews with screenwriter Takada Koji; Original theatrical trailers; Illustrated collector's book

**Reviewed by Kim Newman**

Yakuza die messily in Fukasaku Kinji's gangster trilogy – a pendant to his popular five-film *Battles Without Honour and Humanity* (1973-74). Typically, an assassin barges into a social event or walks up the street and starts firing inaccurately. The victim flails, writhes, grimaces and shrieks as he is repeatedly shot (often not fatally), while bodyguards fire back at the hit man, witnesses take cover behind furniture or people and Fukasaku's camera gets in close, jostling for a good look at the gore. An insistent, ominous guitar-and-brass score underlines the relentless, futile horror of it all. Despite the downbeat tone, these are engaging, almost cheerful films – built around the stoic presence of hardman Sugawara Bunta, playing different characters in each, as the only calm, focused, professional crook amid an array of hypocrites, cowards and perverts.

In *New Battles Without Honour and Humanity*, set in the 1950s, Sugawara gets out of jail after honourably taking a rap and finds himself caught

**Sugawara Bunta in *New Battles...***

between two equally wretched, self-serving factions as his gang tears itself apart. In a typical sequence, the hero slices off his little finger to prove a point – and is told he didn't need to go that far. *The Boss's Head* switches to a contemporary setting but is a variant on the same plot – here, Sugawara takes the jail term to allow a boss's son-in-law to stay free and comes out to find his patron is a useless drug addict being eased out of the gang, while his own promised payment is indefinitely postponed. Both films, advancing on the earlier series, have prominent roles for women – the Lady Macbeth-ish wife of a nervous boss, and a gang moll whose protectors tend to get killed.

Best of the trio is *Last Days of the Boss*, in which Sugawa is disgusted by an outbreak of peace – criticising crimelords who act more like politicians than men – and sets out to break a taboo against assassinating bosses, which leads to a body count of Jacobean proportions. Here, the romance angle is twisted as the hero is in a strange relationship with his sister. Blunt and crude, these are still powerful, scurrilous films.
**Disc:** Extras include trailers and chats with screenwriter Takada Koji.

## RE-ANIMATOR

Stuart Gordon; US 1985; Arrow/region-free Blu-ray; 105 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: Unrated and 'integral' cuts of the film, audio commentaries, making-of doc, interviews with Gordon, cast, crew, docs on Lovecraftian cinema and the Organic Theater, actor Jeffrey Combs reading the original story, essay by Michael Gingold, postcards, 89-page booklet reprinting the 1991 three-issue comic book version of the film.

**Reviewed by Michael Atkinson**

Perhaps the *Naked Lunch* of the Reagan/Thatcher-era indie gore-horror wave, this legendary snark detonation has lost none of its ironic savagery and kitschy wit; in fact, as the textural tropes of the 80s come to seem more stylised to us with each passing year (those gel lights and profusions of fake room smoke), Gordon's spectacularly, tastelessly confident masterpiece appears to strike a perfect balance between earnest genre gravity and explosive nonsense. Lovecraft's modest story, with its rogue medical student attempting to Frankenstein his way to glory with a manic-zombie-producing 're-agent,' is fleshed out as if in a straight-faced soap opera bubble, and the tone is both epitomised and tested by Jeffrey Combs as the megalomaniac with the glowing green hypo, in a hyperbolic, bloodshot comic tour de force that made him a cult figure.

The rest of the cast, particularly debased maiden Barbara Crampton, are remarkable for how their intensely bland ordinariness (not unlike Naomi Watts's sugar-sweet *ingénue* in the first part of Lynch's *Mulholland Dr.*) is eventually ground into burger meat by the story. Crampton's climactic ordeal is a still unbelievable fusion of Sade and Dante – stripped nude, strapped down and subjected to the slaverings of a handheld severed head. A movie that launched a million genre geeks, it remains a merry scandal, and the most inspired movie of its kind.
**Discs:** Arrow goes all-out with extras once again, making its box-set a pop-cult history of the film's legacy, as well as an extrapolation of its psychotronic pleasures.

## THE RECKONING

Jack Gold; UK 1969; Indicator/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; 111 minutes; Certificate 12; 1.75:1. Features: interviews; trailer; image gallery; booklet.

**Reviewed by Kieron Corless**

"If only I'd known that one day I'd grow up to be an English businessman." It's pretty much all there in that one line of blackly comic dialogue – alienation, self-loathing, contempt for the English, wearily uttered (or more likely spat out) by *The Reckoning*'s protagonist Mick Marler, superbly incarnated by Nicol Williamson, a riven, ruthless, swaggering, volatile Liverpudlian of Irish stock, one of the great creations of late 60s British cinema. Director Jack Gold's potent character study-cum-state-of-the-nation piece has languished in relative obscurity since its tepid critical reception in 1970, but its stock has deservedly risen of late, some devotees placing it on a par with *Get Carter* (1971), another tale of a London-based northerner drawn back home to settle a score and reconnect with his past; credit to the Indicator label for this long overdue release.

*The Reckoning*'s production reunited a trio of talents from the equally fascinating *The Bofors Gun* (1968), all approaching the top of their game – the still underrated Gold, a formidably intense Williamson and, perhaps most notably, the Birkenhead-born left-wing playwright John McGrath, whose adaptation of Patrick Hall's novel captures working-class life in the raw, without sentimentality (Marler's Irish father is murdered in a racist attack) or condescension, but also takes a scalpel to the prevailing nexus of British ruling-class and corporate interests.

The film clearly harks back to the cycle of 60s films centred on working-class northern males yearning to escape, but asks, pointedly, what happens when you do; it also prefigures the unsparing bleakness of 70s British films like the aforementioned *Get Carter* and Sidney Lumet's *The Offence*. It now looks like something of a landmark; anyone interested in the history of British cinema will definitely want to take a look.
**Disc:** The transfer is superb, with beautifully vivid Eastmancolor images supplied by none other than the great director of photography Geoffrey Unsworth. Unfortunately all the main players are dead, so there's not much production background, but there is lucid contextualisation by Matthew Sweet, and a punchy, polemical booklet essay by Michael Pattison that nails the layered complexities of the film's politics.

# Television

## SYKES

Roger Race; UK 1972-79; BBC/Network; Region 2 DVD; 1970 minutes; Certificate 12; 4:3

**Reviewed by Robert Hanks**

Toward the end of his long career, when he was profoundly deaf and all but blind, Eric Sykes began to get the sort of attention he deserved – cast by Peter Hall in Molière in the West End (he was very good), and then by Alejandro Amenábar in *The Others* (2001). It is a shame directors of that stature didn't spot his talents earlier. As well as a fine comic writer, who co-scripted a number of *Goon Show* episodes with Spike Milligan, he was a gifted physical comedian – with his gangling limbs and spade-like hands sawing the air, he would have been at home in the silent era; and he had a knack for selling a line, sometimes by underselling it, with an air of mild frustration at having to say these things (though he'd usually written them).

As it is, the 68 episodes of *Sykes* stand as his main memorial, and not just his: they also provided the best opportunities of their careers to Hattie Jacques, adorable as Eric's dreamy, timid, fiercely loyal sister, backing him up in every one of his ludicrous fibs; to Richard Wattis, faintly camp aloofness sliding into boyish credulity, as their snobbish neighbour Mr Brown – Fulbright-Brown, to give him the full name he could never persuade anyone else to use; and to Deryck Guyler as Corky Turnbull, the neighbourhood policeman, yo-yoing from chumminess to officiousness at the slightest threat to his status, and back again as soon as there's any chance of food.

*Sykes* is a character-based, continuity-free comedy in the tradition of *Hancock* (1961); Eric and Hat's sitcom address, 28 Sebastopol Terrace, East Acton, is surely a deliberate *hommage* to the Hancock residence, 23 Railway Cuttings, East Cheam. Though the basic situation doesn't alter – Eric is chronically unemployed, and keen to consolidate his social status by joining the golf club – every week is a fresh start. There are shades of Milligan in the way absurdity punctuates the action, in small details like Eric and Hat's relationship with Peter, the cuckoo that inhabits their clock and is confused about the actual time; or the moment in the very first episode, 'Burglary', when Hattie sits with a record of a dog barking, trying to train the animal to sit. In her very logical simplicity, Hattie's character at times foreshadows Douglas in *Father Ted* (1995-98), as when a dispute about Patrick Moore's astronomical expertise leads her to insist that there are at least two suns, or how come the one in South Africa is so much hotter? (Eric's rebuttal isn't any better informed or more persuasive.) That's in the episode from series six entitled 'End of the World', in which every authority has predicted imminent apocalypse, and while Hat wants to join the neighbours in watching the spectacle up on Shepherd's Hill, Eric wants to stay at home and bid farewell while eating bacon sandwiches.

In that episode, though, you can see reasons why Sykes's reputation isn't as high as his talents seem to warrant: bluntly, there isn't the quality control – the clash of cosmic and pettily domestic is smartly conceived and generates some good gags; but too many of them fall flat. Perhaps *Sykes* was too much Sykes's vehicle, and he lacked someone to spark against. Almost every episode was directed by Roger Race, whose CV otherwise offers little assurance of a creative approach to comedy (Bob Spiers, who went on to make *Ab Fab* and so much else, has a solitary entry on the roster). But still, here is *Sykes*; at times it is glorious, and even when it isn't, it's Sykes.

**Disc:** Good transfer, and series one comes with some jolly and instructive studio outtakes.

**Sykes** The 68 episodes stand as Erik Sykes's main memorial, and also provided the best opportunities of Hattie Jacques's career, adorable as Eric's loyal sister

## HERE'S HARRY

UK 1961-63; BBC/Simply; Region 2 DVD; 300 minutes; Certificate 12; 4:3

**Reviewed by Robert Hanks**

In contrast to the completeness of *Sykes*, only 11 episodes survive from the seven seasons of this vehicle for the Yorkshire comedian Harry Worth, mainly from seasons two and three, and one episode from season five – this is the only one, by the way, with the celebrated title sequence, where he stands at a corner window and lifts one arm and leg, so that in reflection he appears to levitate. Though his legacy in modern comedy has been powerful – Harry Hill's glasses, Count Arthur Strong's hat and bumbling manner – the scripts are unimpressive, and this has far more historical than entertainment value.

**Disc:** Quality varies a good deal from episode to episode, but nothing atrocious.

## IVANHOE

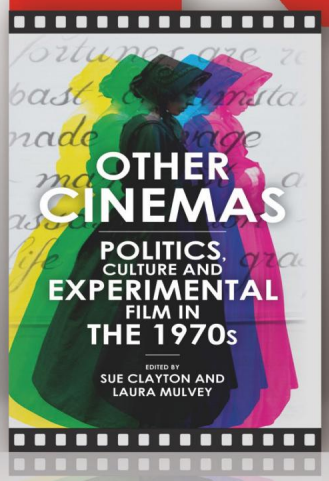
David Maloney; UK 1970; BBC/Simply; Region 2 DVD; 250 minutes; Certificate 12; 4:3

**Reviewed by Robert Hanks**

Even if you don't think you know the plot of *Ivanhoe*, you will have come across it repeatedly in modern tellings of Robin Hood, where Robin (a supporting character in Walter Scott's novel) seems to have pushed out the hero – Wilfrid of Ivanhoe, a Saxon knight who has returned from combat alongside Richard the Lionheart in the Holy Land to fight the tyranny of Prince John and his greedy Norman hangers-on. Having laid much of the groundwork for modern Scottish nationalism in *Rob Roy* and elsewhere, Scott here created one of the ur-texts of English nationalism, establishing the Englishman as independent and plain-spoken to the point of surliness: "Freeman or serf, a Saxon speaks as he thinks"; "Englishmen don't like being pushed." So this is a timely release, though this adaptation, scripted by Alexander Baron, is undercast, with Eric Flynn a pallid hero. There is good support, though, notably from Clive Graham as Robin; John Franklyn-Robbins as Isaac, the interestingly sympathetic Jewish moneylender; and Clare Jenkins and Vivian Brooks as Ivanhoe's dual love interests, the Saxon Lady Rowena and Isaac's daughter Rebecca: both of them seem to have had dispiritingly short careers.

**Disc:** An adequate transfer.

# Read




## OTHER CINEMAS

**Politics, Culture and Experimental Film in the 1970s**

Edited by Sue Clayton and Laura Mulvey, I.B. Tauris, 368pp, hardback, £69, ISBN 9781784537180

*Other Cinemas* establishes the factors that helped to shape alternative film: world cinema and internationalism, the politics of cultural policy and arts funding, new accessible technologies, avant-garde theories, and the development of a dynamic and interactive relationship between film and its audiences. Exploring and celebrating the work of The Other Cinema, the London Film-makers' Co-op and other cornerstones of today's film culture, as well as the impact of creatives such as William Raban and Stephen Dwoskin – and Mulvey and Clayton themselves – this important book takes account of a wave of socially aware film practice without which today's activist, queer, minority and feminist voices would have struggled to gather such volume.

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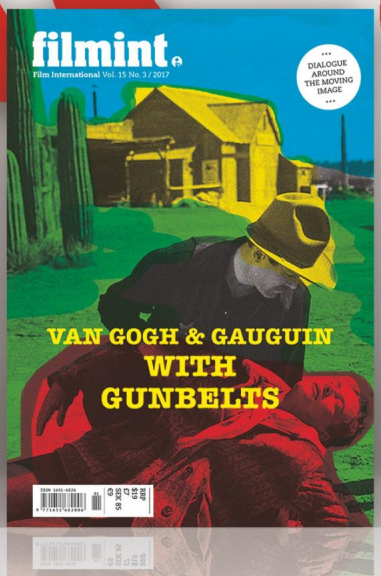


## FILM INTERNATIONAL

Editor in-chief Daniel Lindvall, Intellect, 250pp, paperback, illustrated, £8, ISSN 16516826

*Film International* covers film culture as part of the broader culture, history and economy of society. We address topics of contemporary relevance from historically informed perspectives. We wish to bridge the gap between the academy and the outside world, and encourage the participation of scholars from a variety of disciplines.

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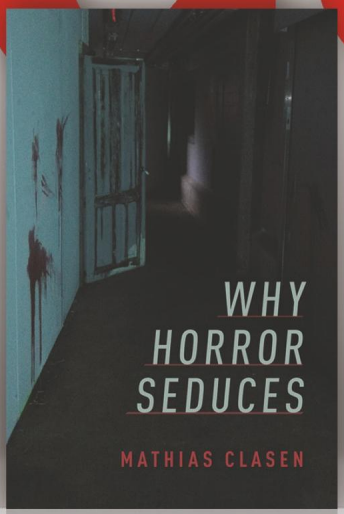


## WHY HORROR SEDUCES

By Mathias Clasen, Oxford University Press, 224pp, paperback, illustrated, £19.99, ISBN 9780190666514

Vampires, menacing strangers, ghosts, and witches – horror has been part of cinema for almost as long as pictures have moved on screens. But why are they captivating? What is the drive to be frightened, and why is it popular? This book draws on findings in the evolutionary social sciences, showing how the genre is a product of human nature. Using popular works such as *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Shining* and *Jaws*, Clasen claims that horror works by targeting humans' tendency to find pleasure in make-believe, allowing us to experience negative emotions at a high level of intensity within a safe context.

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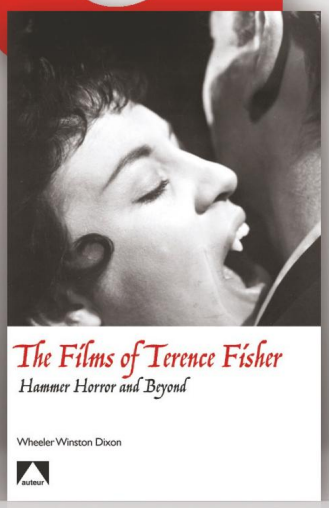


## THE FILMS OF TERENCE FISHER

**Hammer Horror and Beyond**

By Wheeler Winston Dixon, Auteur, 426pp, paperback, illustrated, £19.99, ISBN 9781911325338

"*The Films of Terence Fisher* is a cinephile's dream, as well as an exemplary work of scholarship." Steven Shaviro, author, *Post Cinematic Affect*

Tracing the entire career of the director Terence Fisher, best known for his Gothic horror films for Hammer – such as *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) and *Dracula* (1958) – *The Films of Terence Fisher* covers not only his horror films, but also his *films noirs*, comedies and early apprenticeship work to create a full picture of Fisher's life and work. Brimming with more than 70 rare stills, as well as interviews and detailed analysis of Fisher's films, this is the ultimate 'one-stop' book on a British cinema legend.

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# Books

Blonde Venus: Maria Riva's biography of her mother Marlene Dietrich, pictured in Billy Wilder's *A Foreign Affair* (1948), is intimate and very moving

# MOMMIE DEAREST

## MARLENE DIETRICH

**The Life, by Her Daughter**

By Maria Riva, Pegasus Books, 788pp,
ISBN 9781681775029

**Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson**

"It's a funny sensation, looking at a face you know, or think you know, is your mother's, who has been made into a deity." The young Maria Riva's baffled reaction to viewing her mother's first Paramount publicity photographs may be a common experience for all children of Hollywood stars. But when the face belongs to Marlene Dietrich and the photograph has been artfully lit by Josef von Sternberg, the effect must be all the more overwhelming.

A hefty personal portrait, *Marlene Dietrich: The Life, by Her Daughter* is remarkably intimate and very moving: the author and her subject could hardly be closer. In fact, like Karin Wieland's 2011 study *Dietrich and Riefenstahl*, this is almost a dual biography. Riva sets out to relate the life of her mother the star and, almost accidentally, tells her own story too. As such, the book is just as candid and fascinating about the strange business of growing up in Hollywood, as it is about being a Golden Age star.

Riva was born to Dietrich and her husband Rudolf Sieber in 1924. The couple had met on a movie set and although their romance swiftly cooled, they remained married until Sieber's death in 1976. Though they mostly lived on separate continents, they kept up a facade of domesticity for the publicity machine, despite Dietrich's numerous affairs and Sieber's long-term relationship with a Russian woman called Tami, who lived and travelled with the family, occasionally posing as Riva's governess. Tami, like Riva, knew her job was to dive out of shot if a photographer came close to the 'happy couple'.

Dietrich was a possessive mother who kept Riva close. She had a tendency to lie about her daughter's age as much as her own, forcing "The Child" to wear frilly, puffed-sleeve frocks she had long outgrown. This proximity allows Riva to present an insider's account of the making of Dietrich's early films, including her breakthrough *The Blue Angel* (1930), offering an insight not just into her mother's awesome charisma, but her hard-fought perfectionism and incredible ability to remain detached and critical about her own image. Riva can also seemingly repeat

reams of dialogue, dripping with dropped names, from dressing rooms and breakfast tables. She even goes as far as to imagine conversations from before she was born, although she has the advantage of Dietrich's paper archive, including diaries and letters, to give substance to her chatter. Dietrich seems to have been breezily open about her affairs once she was behind closed doors – passing letters from her lovers to her husband for his information, making carbon copies of her own and simply leaving her correspondence lying around. Riva was closest to her mother, and her mother's career, in the wardrobe department, playing with swatches of lace and silk and offering Travis Banton her own astute design ideas and assisting Nellie, Dietrich's personal hairdresser. She offered a second set of eyes on set too – spotting a twisted seam or furled hem that might infuriate Dietrich before the actor herself had a chance to notice it in the full-length mirror she had positioned next to the camera.

As Riva grows older and begins her own career as an actor, she understands better what is going on in the connecting hotel bedrooms and Hollywood villas with her mother's sprawling collection of male and female lovers. That is not to say that she didn't have strong opinions as a child. Even a studio brat can harbour star crushes – the appearance of John Gilbert had Riva running faster than usual for her autograph book. The actor Brian Aherne, who made a pet of her, sent her Shakespeare plays and wrote her mother beautifully romantic letters, was her special favourite among Dietrich's conquests.

Riva is frank about her mother's faults,

*The book is just as fascinating about the strange business of growing up in Hollywood, as it is about being a Golden Age star*

from the gossipy tone with which she outlines Dietrich's physical insecurities to more serious reprimands, such as Dietrich's callous treatment of her lovers, the way she dismissed them on a whim or kept them dancing in attendance. The Dietrich-Sternberg dynamic, as described here, seems more like mutual torture than love, despite the ravishing results of their collaboration on film. Riva spares us neither her mother's heartless reactions to the deaths of her suitors (even Ernest Hemingway's suicide, or Gilbert's demise in their shared bed) nor her casual racism. Riva is most shaken, clearly, by how her parents failed poor Tami, a second mother to her, who died in hospital, tortured by her own damaged mental health, while Sieber had moved on to another woman.

Ultimately, of course, Dietrich's alcoholic decline, which fatally distorted her personality and ruined her health, is what breaks Riva's heart. The book closes with Riva watching Dietrich sleep in her Paris apartment, shortly before her death in 1992, ravaged by booze and age and very far from a Hollywood goddess: "I stand looking at this pathetic creature, who calls herself my mother, and feel sorry for both of us."

## REINVENTING HOLLYWOOD

### How 1940s Filmmakers Changed Movie Storytelling

By David Bordwell, University of Chicago Press, 592pp, ISBN 9780226487755

**Reviewed by Tony Rayns**

Didn't see this coming, but David Bordwell has written a book that many people will want to read with a copy of Leonard Maltin's *Classic Movie Guide* within arm's reach. A massive book, at that. The proof copy under review lacks the much-needed index, but the publisher says that the finished article will run to 592 pages. Bordwell's already published spin-off book *The Rhapsodes: How 1940s Critics Changed American Film Culture* was svelte by comparison.

It's a book with a specific and quite singular agenda, unimprovably set out in the introduction: in the 1940s, Bordwell says, "the *how* of movie narrative becomes as important as the *what*. We find dead narrators and multiple flashbacks and surprise voice-overs and bizarre dream sequences. Many of these techniques can be found piecemeal in earlier eras, but in the 1940s they became common, prominent and unexpectedly varied. Narrative options crystallized in ways that gave American films a new complexity and power." With an exhaustive (and, it must be said, exhausting) range of reference, he explores, catalogues and analyses through hundreds of examples the many ways that storytelling innovations became institutionalised in American films between 1939 and 1952.

The project is fundamentally anti-auteurist, in that Bordwell is arguing that filmmakers learned from and copied each other in ways that transcended individual authorship; he takes Hollywood itself to be the *auteur* of most of the plot-forms and variations he discusses. (That's where the copy of Maltin's *Guide* may come in handy: many films are cited without reference to their directors or stars, though even Maltin and his team haven't seen some of the B-movie obscurities.) It's not all narration from beyond the grave and dime-book Freud. Bordwell devotes

Robert Siodmak's *The Killers* (1946)

substantial chapters to the sudden proliferation of flashbacks (common enough in the silent era, rare in 30s movies), noting extreme cases like the Siodmak version of *The Killers* (1946), which offers 11 flashbacks and presents them in achronological order; to the "what they didn't know was" syndrome, in which crucial plot information is withheld from the viewer; and to "realism, fantasy and other forms of artifice" with their various sleights of hand in the film language. The closing chapters focus more on genre variations than on plot-morphology as such.

Bordwell revealed what it took to achieve this degree of omniscience about 40s Hollywood in an entry in his and Kristin Thompson's invaluable blog *Observations on Film Art*. It's the entry dated 6 September 2016, entitled 'Oof! Out!', and it comes with photos showing the vast file of index-cards he compiled as he slogged through all those hundreds of films – not to mention the novels, plays and vintage radio dramas that provided storylines for some of them and others with narrative-shaping ideas. Bordwell is well aware of the Borgesian impossibility of real omniscience (I half-recall a passing reference to Myra Breckinridge's fetishisation of 30s films, but can't find it again now without an index; if it's there, it suggests an underlying sense of absurdity), but he has certainly thrown himself into the project with indefatigable gusto.

Auteurism, though, dies hard with a vengeance. Bordwell places 'Interludes' between most of the chapters and devotes several of them to mini-essays on individual directors' careers in the light of the book's overarching concerns. Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Preston Sturges, Hitchcock and Welles get this treatment, and although they're not framed as analytical criticism these essays display Bordwell's characteristic acuity and precision: they're fine contributions to the body of writing on those directors. By way of balance, another of the 'Interludes' centres on adaptation strategies in the film version of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1940), and that's discussed entirely in terms of the producer Sol Lesser's ideas for filming the play; director Sam Wood and composer Aaron Copland aren't mentioned and designer William Cameron Menzies gets one namecheck. In his concluding chapter, Bordwell acknowledges that "many masterful movies" – he gives *Going My Way* (1944), *To Have and Have Not* (1945) and *My Darling Clementine* (1946) as examples – made no use of the narrative innovations the book is about.

At the outset, Bordwell stresses the cross-studio fraternisation, from Selznick-Zanuck poker parties to George Cukor's Sunday buffets for his gay circle, which allows him to speak of 'Hollywood' as a monolithic entity. But I think the next phase of this research will need to be more specific about what happened in each studio, major or minor, and about which editors on which payrolls were responsible for which innovations. I would have liked to read something, too, about the several specialists in montage sequences who went on to become directors. But boy, as a two-fisted approach to rethinking Hollywood's evolution, this is some start.

## BEN RIVERS

### Ways of Worldmaking

Edited by Bettina Steinbrügge and Ben Rivers, Mousse Publishing, 224pp, ISBN 9788867492480

**Reviewed by Jordan Cronk**

Concerned as much with its subjects and their surroundings as it is the material and aesthetic constituents of its presentation, the work of British artist and filmmaker Ben Rivers conjures highly tactile worlds of objects and ephemera. That *Ben Rivers: Ways of Worldmaking*, a hardbound collection of Rivers-related art, essays and ephemera is itself a beautiful object should come as no surprise: all of Rivers's films exist at once as audiovisual indices of largely anonymous people existing in vivid yet anonymous places, and as physical manifestations (ie, documents) of their highly unique means and modes of production. Lest we forget, Rivers once titled one of his films *Things* (2014).

A collaboration between the Camden Arts Centre, La Triennale di Milano, the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago and Kunstverein in Hamburg, each of which recently hosted solo exhibitions by Rivers, *Ways of Worldmaking* presents a holistic view of the artist's practice, embodying both the spirit of his multifarious approach to anthropological cinema and the interdisciplinary scope of his gallery work. What this amounts to is a generous selection of full-page glossy images taken from Rivers's 30-plus films and the exhibitions in question; a trio of essays by noted scholars and curators Ed Halter, Melissa Gronlund and Andréa Picard; a number of shorter texts, poems and transcripts taken from or in some way related to individual works or their inspirations; and notes on a majority of the films by Rivers himself. From this foundation an entire aesthetic and artistic sensibility can be gleaned, from the rough-hewn patina of Rivers's hand-processed 16mm images to the utopian ideals embodied by his wilfully isolated subjects and the remote environments they occupy, to the many literary referents that haunt his quasi-narratives.

Extending this thoroughly Riversian ethos (the filmmaker is billed as the book's co-editor, alongside Kunstverein director Bettina Steinbrügge), *Ways of Worldmaking* is organised in an associative – one might say poetic – manner. Texts are presented with little contextual information: an excerpt from Robert Pinget's novel *Fable*, for instance, is offered as a complement to Rivers's notes on *Things*, but its connection to the film, for those unfamiliar with the source, is left obscure. Similarly, 'Edgelands', a short travelogue by Renee Gladman, is in thematic accord with Rivers's nomadic practice, but its kinship with the filmmaker's work is never explained.

*That this hardbound collection of Rivers-related art, essays and ephemera is itself a beautiful object should come as no surprise*

Luckily the essays provide a useful through-line and, just as importantly, approach Rivers's work from fresh angles. Halter discusses the director's methodology in relation to philosopher Nelson Goodman's own 1978 work *Ways of Worldmaking*, as well as Rivers's predilection for speculative fiction; Gronlund takes up theoretician Bill Nichols's notion of the 'observer effect' and triangulates the concept between subject, audience and artist in the constellation of works comprising *The Sky Trembles and the Earth Is Afraid and the Two Eyes Are Not Brothers* (2015); and Picard dissects Rivers's singular ability to warp and distend time, not simply through montage, but via intricate sound design. It's enough to make one yearn for more in the way of critical prose; after all, as Rivers notes, his work presents a "multiverse of innumerable interpretations". Here are a few of the most persuasive.

## JULIEN DUVIVIER

By Ben McCann, Manchester University Press, 272pp, ISBN 9780719091148

**Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau**

Ben McCann's book on Julien Duvivier is a most welcome addition to the esteemed series on French film directors from Manchester University Press. Duvivier is part of a cohort of eminent French filmmakers, alongside Marcel Carné and René Clair, who suffered a severe critical fall from grace at the hands of the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics, led by François Truffaut, for their association with the mainstream 'Tradition of Quality'. As a result, in spite of producing great classics and popular hits during the golden age of the 1930s (*La Belle équipe*, 1936; *Pépé le Moko*, 1937; *Un carnet de bal*, 1937) and after (*Le Petit Monde de Don Camillo*, 1952; *Voici le temps des assassins*, 1956), there has been relatively little material on Duvivier even in France, and no monograph on him in English. McCann's comprehensive study is thus a timely contribution to scholarship, at a time when an increasing number of Duvivier films are becoming available.

Thoroughly researched and clearly written, the book covers the whole of Duvivier's substantial career – from the 1920s through to his death in 1967 from a car crash induced by a heart attack – encompassing more than 60 films made in France and elsewhere, with a notable stint in Hollywood. McCann's aim is simple but bold: to reclaim Duvivier from the critical depredations induced by the *politique des auteurs* – even though, as he points out, Duvivier is not mentioned in Truffaut's 1954 flagship essay, 'A Certain Tendency in French Cinema'.

Of course, one can only applaud the desire to rehabilitate Duvivier. His 1930s classics have long had their fans, but it is good to read about his silent work and about less well-known, yet fascinating later films such as *Panique* (1946), *L'Homme à l'imperméable* (1957) and *Marie-Octobre* (1959). McCann's project is not without its ironies, however. While springing from a desire to prove the auteurists wrong, it follows their methodology in looking for stylistic and thematic consistencies, underlining the continued stronghold of this approach over French cinema studies. McCann is convincing in his discussion of common themes (misanthropy, pessimism, the love of 'men's stories') and of the filmmaker's celebrated virtuoso camerawork, but the single-minded pursuit occasionally produces a flattening effect, especially given Duvivier's versatile generic palette. There are times when less accent on consistencies and more on articulating the films' cultural context (eg, the religious themes in the silent films; the ferocious misogyny of the post-war period) would have been useful.

*In spite of his popular hits, there has been relatively little material on Duvivier even in France, and no monograph on him in English*

McCann also somewhat overplays the influence of critical disparagement on the filmmaker's later decline. In fact, the virulent polemics against the *cinéma de papa* in the 1950s never stopped Duvivier scoring at the box office. The decline started later, when the critical agenda had moved on. These quibbles apart, McCann's study opens up the cornucopia of Duvivier's work for an English-speaking readership and will be an essential resource for any serious scholar and/or fan of classic French cinema.

**Panic on the streets: Julien Duvivier's *Panique* (1946) follows a Jewish man hounded by his neighbours**

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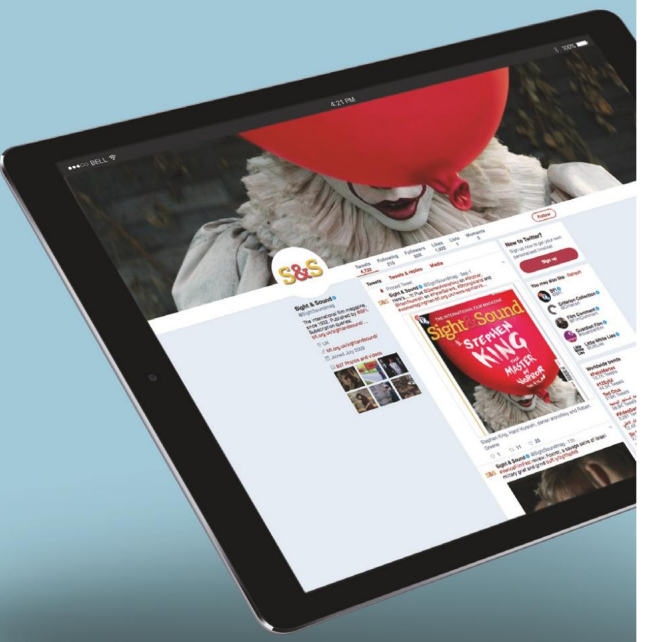

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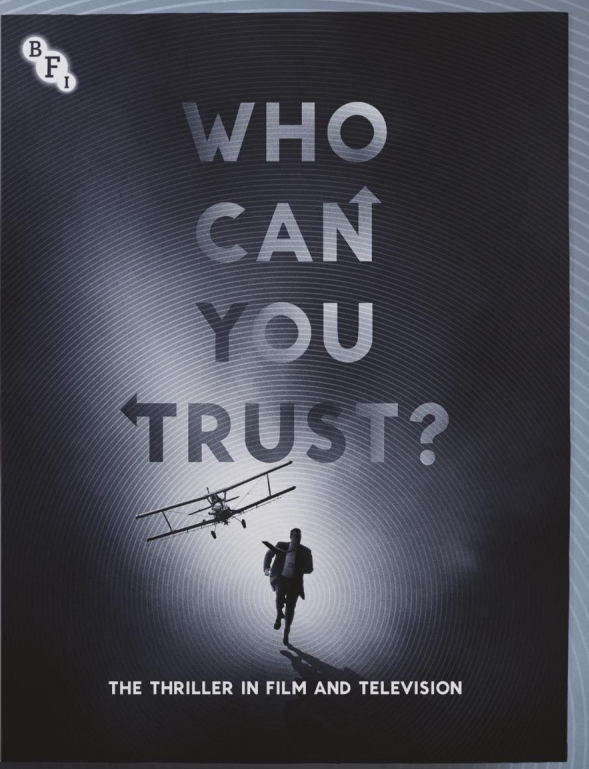


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# READERS' LETTERS

*Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN*
*Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk*

## HOME STRETCH

We all agree that Talking Pictures TV is filling a void on TV, offering a wonderful chance to enjoy mainly British films of the 30s through to the 70s. But it is unfortunate that the transmission many of us receive on digital televisions appears to project all films in a widescreen ratio – necessary for advertisement breaks, but it distorts the look of films of the 30s and 40s. Channels such as London Live and TCM screen old films in the correct ratio within widescreen ad breaks. Is this something Talking Pictures can correct?
**Peter Herbert** *The Arts Project, London*

## HOT TUBE TIME MACHINE

Can I add to the nostalgia about films on television in the past? I can remember BBC1 showing on three successive Friday evenings in 1963, after the news, at about 9.30: Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* and both parts of his *Ivan the Terrible*. I am pretty sure that, not long afterwards, they screened Fellini's *I Vitelloni* and *The White Sheik*.

If only they would show them or their like at any time, on any channel today, let alone on their only channel at peak time.
**John Dinning** *Cardiff*

## ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST

Like Will Goble (Letters, *S&S*, October), I recall the BBC's Film Club series, Moviedrome and *Moving Pictures* (introduced by Howard Schuman, and once called "the best movie programme in the world" by Quentin Tarantino). But I can go back further: in the mid-70s our local ITV region, HTV West, had its own film club presented by our answer to Melvyn Bragg, the great A.C.H. Smith. He would introduce that week's film(s) and occasionally interview its director, cameraman, editor or anyone else he could find associated with the film. Through this I encountered Godard, Dalí and Buñuel (a double-bill of *L'Age d'or* and *Un chien andalou*) and, most important of all to my own film education, Kurosawa Akira, whose 'lesser' later film, *Dodes'ka-den*, had me spellbound.

Today, with almost no regional independent programming, a 13-year-old is far less likely to encounter, by chance more than design, such wonders of world cinema.
**Kevin Rawlings** *By email*

## WHERE OGLES DARE

You introduce Christina Newland's piece 'All I Desire' (*S&S*, October) with the line: "For female critics, talking about ogling men on screen is a subversive joy." I expect what you mean by this is *some* female critics. Others watch and write about films, and have desire that doesn't encompass the ogling of men.

The author of the piece acknowledges our existence on page 36. You should, too, or you will find yourselves overtly challenging one form of symbolic annihilation only to passively perpetuate another.
**Hannah Hamad** *Cardiff*

## LETTER OF THE MONTH
## AND THE BLAND PLAYED ON

**I wanted to write in praise of Nick Pinkerton's review of *The Dark Tower* (*S&S*, October), which distilled everything wrong with modern moviemaking. The lack of concision he bemoans in the modern tentpole feature robs cinema of its potency and its ability to make an impact within a closed narrative. Films are no longer a part of the wider conversation for this very reason.**

**The overpraising of mediocrity has also contributed to the problem. Studios now use politics to promote films in an attempt to create a discussion in the media, with the result that critics, playing into the hands of the marketing machine, overpraise bland, cliché-ridden films because of their political context rather than their merits. Hence *Wonder Woman*, for example, was praised for bringing us an impossibly beautiful demi-god to admire, but not criticised for its rote dialogue, poor special effects, cliché-ridden plotting and forgettable, meaningless action sequences devoid of flair or personality.**

**The malaise has spread to independent/arthouse cinema, where profits are thin and films are increasingly safe and unchallenging. The blurring of modern culture continues and cinema becomes ever less relevant, less meaningful and less interesting from the top down. Pinkerton's review stands as a warning to anyone who cares about cinema in an age when, as he says, the multiplexes have been rendered "a near-total wasteland".**
**Ben Samuel** By email

## MCBRIDE AND PREJUDICE

In his review of *Two Cheers for Hollywood: Joseph McBride on Movies* (Books, *S&S*, October), Geoff Andrew asks: "Who else would write, 'George Stevens is the most underrated American director today' and claim *Shane* as 'the greatest of all westerns'?" Well, I would for one, and have recently done so, in a book on George Stevens due to be published next year. Bravo, Joseph McBride.
**Neil Sinyard** *Saxby All Saints, North Lincolnshire*

## LOVE STREAMS

I am an unashamed fan of film as film, and of cinemas – the bigger the better. But Christopher Nolan's preference for large film formats, which Nick James cites in his defence of Netflix (Editorial, *S&S*, September), misses one crucial aspect: the viewer.

We do not all live within spitting distance of an Imax, the latest sound and 3D technology or, indeed, an old-fashioned large-scale picture palace. My nearest cinema is a 75-seat, not-for-profit ex-farm supplies building, 25 minutes away. The next cinema is a packing-shed conversion, an hour and a half away, and the nearest purpose-built cinema (1936) is a four-hour return journey.

Lovers of film take what they can get, and services such as Netflix and MUBI, as well as good old-fashioned DVDs and Blu-rays, are a life saver.
**Pete Watkins** *Collingwood, New Zealand*

## MY BLU HEAVEN

I'd like to share with Roger Wilmut (Letters, *S&S*, October) the news that it is possible to buy all-region Blu-ray and DVD versions of Marcel Pagnol's Marseille trilogy with English subtitles. They seem to be based on the same 4k restoration as the recent Criterion edition, and can be ordered via boutique.marcel-pagnol.com, Fnac or Amazon.fr.

While it is helpful of *S&S* to keep us abreast of disc releases outside Europe, it would be even more useful if you could tell us about European releases of films with English subtitling which are otherwise unavailable in the UK – and which can be played on our machines without needing multi-region upgrades. After years of waiting, I recently came upon an official Spanish release of Francesco Rosi's *Illustrious Corpses* with English subtitles.
**Bruce Hanwell** *By email*

### Additions and corrections

**October** P.58 *Daphne*: Certificate 15, 87m 31s; p.65 *Journey Through French Cinema*: Certificate 12A, 200m 39s; p.66 *Kills on Wheels*: Certificate 15, 102m 49s; p.69 *Night Is Short, Walk On Girl*: Certificate 15, 92m 29s; p.74 *Shin Godzilla*: Certificate 15, 119m 51s; p.75 *Step*: 1.85:1; p.76 *Tramontane*: Certificate U, 105m 2s

ENDINGS...

# EVE'S BAYOU

Kasi Lemmons's tale of infidelity, voodoo and murder in the Louisiana bayous shows history has as many shades as witnesses

**By Kelli Weston**

"The summer I killed my father I was ten years old." So *Eve's Bayou* (1997) begins and so it will broadly end, with the death of Louis Batiste (Samuel L. Jackson) as told by his youngest daughter Eve (played by Jurnee Smollett and narrated by Tamara Tunie in voiceover). It's a bold choice from director Kasi Lemmons, who also wrote what was her first feature, a Southern gothic family saga that might have been lifted from the pages of Flannery O'Connor or Tennessee Williams, and which earned comparisons to Ingmar Bergman from the critic Roger Ebert. Ultimately the film loses nothing by announcing its end this way, and there is no twist: Louis dies just as Eve promises he will. But as the summer of her father's death unfolds, the film reveals itself to be an exercise in the shadowy dynamism of memory. For *Eve's Bayou*, history has as many shades as it has witnesses and such a premise does not lend itself to an easy ending.

Perhaps naturally, the film begins with a history lesson. Eve recounts the origins of the town and the Batiste clan: when an African slave woman saved her white master's life, he rewarded her with her freedom and a stretch of land on the Louisiana bayou: Eve's Bayou. In return, she bore the man 16 children. Young Eve and her family are the descendants of this union, and "I was named for her," Eve explains. Our protagonist inherits something else from her ancestor as well: clairvoyance, a gift her aunt Mozelle (Debbi Morgan) also possesses. Louis, meanwhile, appears to have inherited the sexual appetite of his forefather, and his philandering becomes so reckless and public that it soon infects his entire family. Eve begins acting out; his elegant wife Roz (Lynn Whitfield) nervously cuts herself; and Cisely (Meagan Good), Eve's older sister and their father's clear favourite, descends into depression.

One night Cisely confides in Eve that Louis once drunkenly tried to kiss her, and Eve decides to rid her family of Louis once and for all. She goes to visit a local voodoo woman Elzora (Diahann Carroll), and on the way bumps into Mr Mereaux, hinting to him during their conversation that his wife has been seeing Louis on the sly.

Eve expects to receive a voodoo doll from Elzora, hoping to remedy her powerlessness by becoming the architect of her father's pain. But when Elzora tells her there is no doll and that Louis's death is already assured, Eve races to her father's side just in time to watch him die at Mereaux's hands.

In the wake of the death, Eve and Cisely end up on the banks of the bayou. Eve has discovered a letter from their father to Mozelle detailing the fateful kiss that precipitated his death and in his version Cisely kissed him. At first, when Eve confronts her, Cisely insists that she didn't lie, allowing her sister to 'see' what happened for herself. Like Mozelle's, Eve's psychic visions are cloaked in black and white, a series of fleeting, textured images, but the telling shot never comes. The truth of whoever initiated the kiss remains lost. Cisely falls sobbing into her sister's arms, saying, "I don't know what happened!" And somehow, that's right. Throughout the film members of the Batiste family have shown they have largely survived their traumas by passing on their stories. Never has a film more clearly demonstrated that history belongs to the storyteller – however unreliable they might be.

*As the summer of her father's death unfolds, the film reveals itself to be an exercise in the shadowy dynamism of memory*

Lemmons, for her part, has refused to clarify the ending. She "was sick of the image of the noble, slightly sweaty, angry black women", and so made a film about women she recognised. Indeed *Eve's Bayou* is populated by glamorous, middle-class, but, more importantly, complicated black girls and women, still a rarity 20 years on. At the end of it all, the truth of the kiss matters less than the solidarity of the sisters, so gracefully realised in the film's final moments.

Eve and Cisely bury their father's letter in the swamp and the adult Eve's voiceover returns, repeating the film's opening words. "Memory is a selection of images, some elusive, others printed indelibly on the brain. Each image is like a thread, each thread woven together to make a tapestry of intricate texture. And the tapestry tells a story, and the story is our past."

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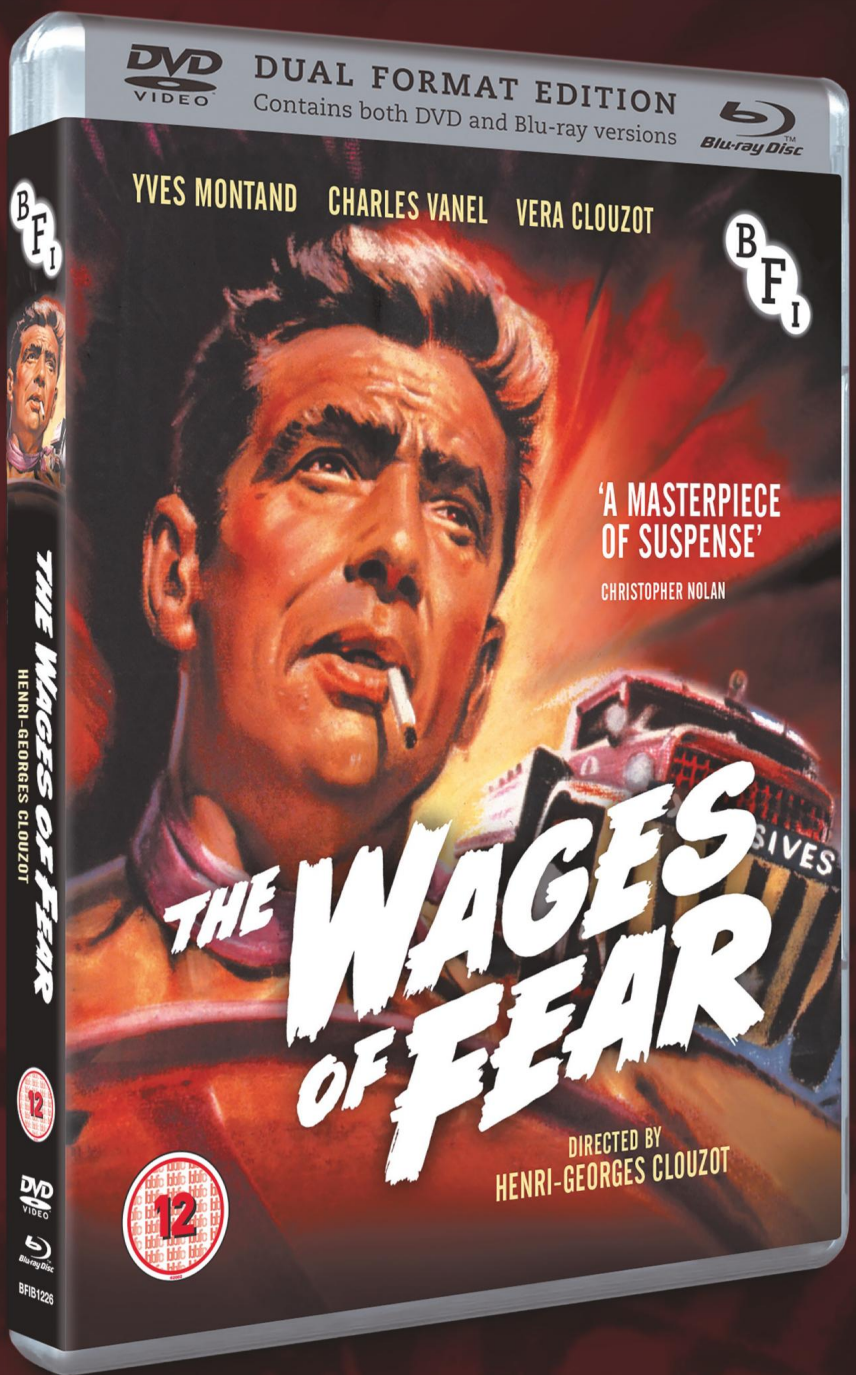


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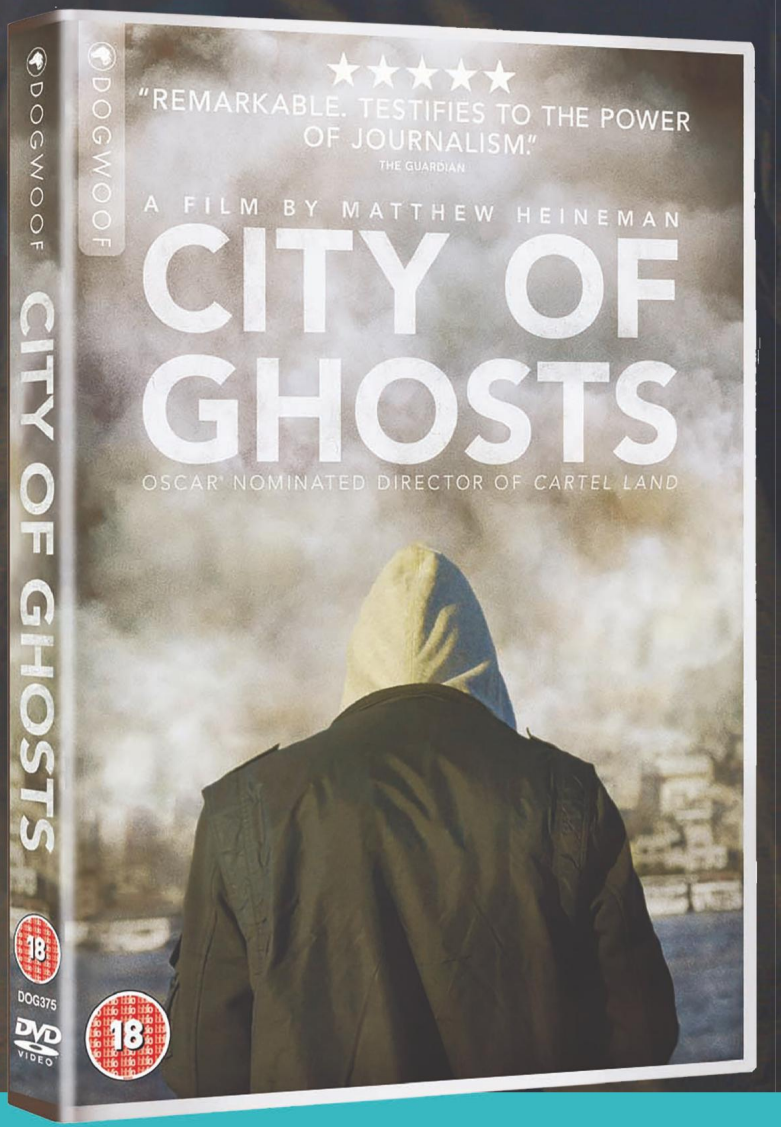


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